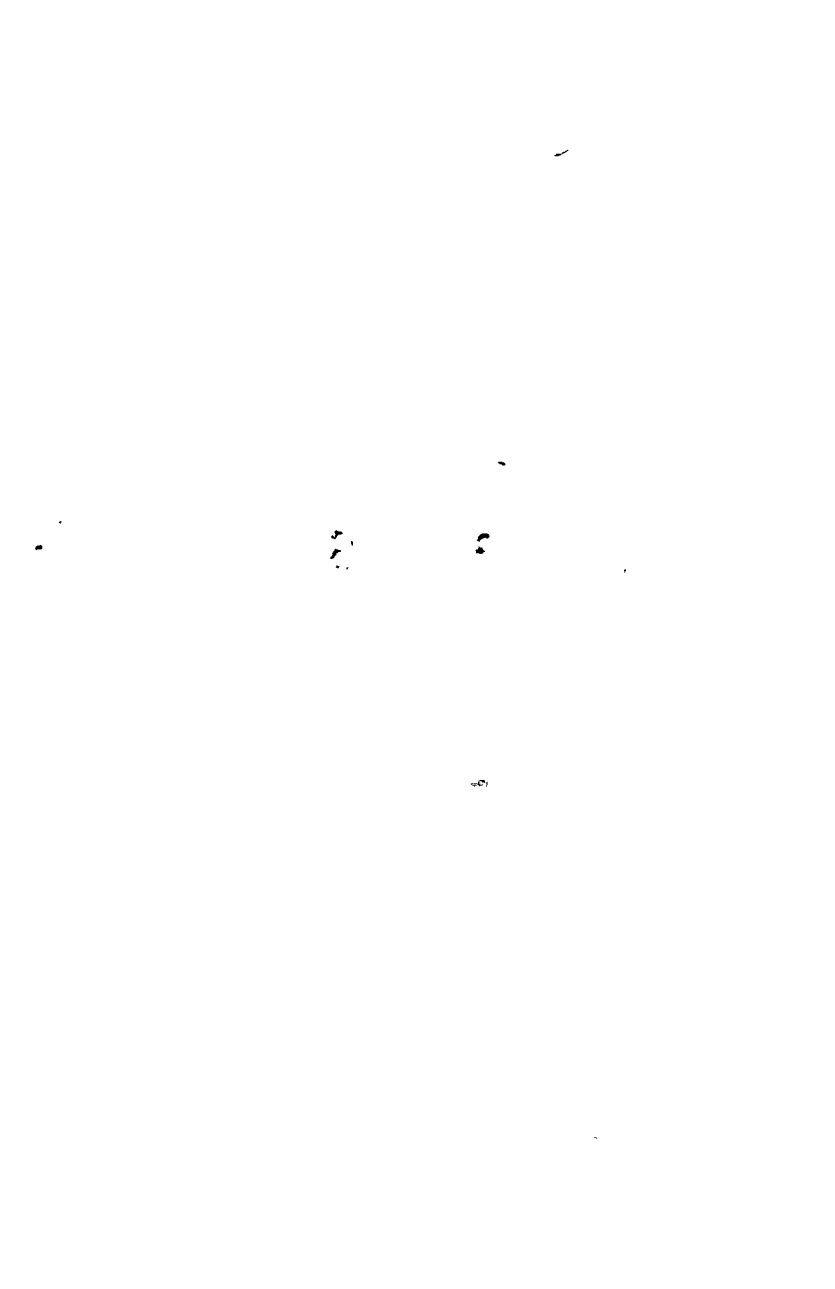


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LORD LOUIS MOUNTBATTEN

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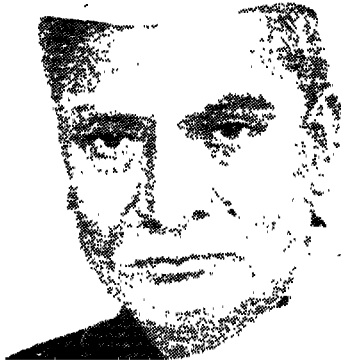
TO

LORD LOUIS MOUNTBATTEN

*The last British Viceroy and the
first Governor-General of Free India*

Who played a glorious part in creating
an atmosphere of amity, goodwill and
friendship between India and England.

Will His Lordship play his part again
to bring about an understanding on
the question of the KOH-I-NOOR
in the interest of both the Nations ?



DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD

“Koh-i-Noor is, no doubt, a proud possession for any nation. But it is primarily meant for Kings and Queens. We have neither a King nor a Queen, nor even a Crown in our country. India is a Republic and a Republic has nothing to do with diamonds. Our President needs no Crown. He is content with his Gandhi Cap.”



Mr. JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

“It is an amusing fact that Mr. Jawahar Lal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of Free India, has made no mention of the Koh-i-Noor in any form in any of his remarkable books on Indian and World History. Presumably he is not interested in things which are dead as stones. And the Koh-i-Noor is after all a stone, just as a King is after all a man and a Queen is after all a woman.”

PREFACE

KOH-I-NOOR is the most brilliant and the most precious diamond of the world. It has been rightly called the King of Diamonds and the Diamond of Kings. Its entire history is linked with the Royalties of various countries and of various ages. It was many a time the cause of the murder of Kings, dishonour of Queens and fearful intrigues at the Royal Courts.

Koh-i-Noor has a legendary origin in the dawn of history, before the times of the Mahabharata, over five thousand years ago. It remained with the Hindu kings for several centuries, making its presence felt by causing the rise and fall of many a monarch. Later it fell into the hands of the Moghul Emperors of India, who staked their lives and kingdoms for its possession.

Nearly two centuries ago, Nadir Shah, an adventurer from Persia, invaded India in search of power and plenty and took possession of this diamond from the King of Delhi by cunningly exchanging turbans. It is now called in history as 'Turban Trick'. The Persian invader was so much dazzled by its beauty, lustre and brilliance that he exclaimed in wonder : KOH-I-NOOR ! which means 'Mountain of Light'. The original name of this diamond is *Samantik Mani*.

Later, Shah Shuja, the King of Afghanistan, managed to get it, but ultimately had to surrender it to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, under adverse circumstances, during his stay in Lahore. The rejoicings that followed its possession by the Sikh Ruler have created rich folk lore in Northern India.

After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Prince Daleep Singh possessed the great Koh-i-Noor. He was forced to part with it and hand it over to the British under the Treaty of Lahore dated 29th March 1849. This peerless gem, thus, left the shores of India and was presented to Queen Victoria in 1850. Since then this wonder diamond of India is in the hands of the British Royalty. Have they got any legal or moral right to retain it any longer in view of the vigorous and persistent demand for its restoration by India ? With the Indians it is now a

question of National honour. Will the British part with it as gracefully and as cheerfully as they recently relinquished their political hold over India—at one time the brightest jewel in the British Crown ?

The biography of Koh-i-Noor is the history of India and this unique diamond is as dear to India as Shakespeare is to England. Recently some serious questions were asked in the Indian Parliament about its restoration to India and there was consequently a great furore in the British Press. A regular controversy started in the leading newspapers of both the countries. But it was wisely shelved at that time by all concerned in view of the impending Coronation. Now when the Coronation is over, we can think over and study the whole problem in a dispassionate manner.

Koh-i-Noor is, no doubt, a proud possession for any nation. But it is primarily meant for Kings and Queens. We have neither a King nor a Queen, nor even a Crown in our country. India is a Republic and a Republic has nothing to do with diamonds. Our President needs no Crown. He is content with his Gandhi Cap. So is our Prime Minister. And it is an amusing fact that Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru has made no mention of the Koh-i-Noor in any form in any of his remarkable books on Indian and World History. Presumably he is not interested in things which are dead as stones. And the Koh-i-Noor is after all a stone, just as a King is after all a man and a Queen is after all a woman.

Now, if we manage to get back the Koh-i-Noor, what will we do with it ? Shall we place it in the *Taj Mahal* and paint the lily ? Or, shall we place it in some museum for people to gaze at it in wonder and admiration ? Will it not be indelicate to demand it back from the Crown of the British Queen and thus injure the feelings and sentiments of her people ?

In the concluding chapter of this book a 'solution' has been offered. Will the British Royalty, backed by the British people, rise to the occasion and act in a manner worthy of them ? And will the people and the Parliament of India reciprocate by doing their duty subsequently ?

New Delhi,

N. B. Sen.

1st August 1953.

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CHAPTER I

Diamond Mines of India

India is famous for its diamonds, gems and jewels. From the earliest times we find jewels closely related to royalty. If you turn to the *Puranas*, the pre-historic accounts of India's deities and kings from the earliest times, you will find reference being made to various jewels worn by the deities described in beautiful prose and poetry. Turn to the two epics of the Hindus; the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and you will find court descriptions and pen-portraits of Lord Krishna, Pandvas and Kauravas; Lord Rama, his brothers and Ravana, replete with accounts of the various jewels which they wore. In fact every account of any deity or a king or queen, wherever found in the earliest scriptures of the Hindus, gives detailed accounts of their pearl-necklaces, diamond ear-rings and jewel-bedecked swords.

Coming to the Hindu era, we find the same love and display of jewels and diamonds. In fact the greatness and glory of a monarch was measured by the vastness of his collection of jewels. They vied with one another in collecting well-known jewels of great lustre and resplendency. Presents from chieftains to their sovereigns, from kings to their queens, and from one potentate to another invariably consisted

of diamonds and diamond-studded ornaments, swords, etc. We often read about rubies, pearls and diamonds of unusual brightness possessed by different monarchs in the different periods. They passed from one ruler to another either as presents or as booty. Often they made history and have left stories which live upto this time.

Muslim invaders, who settled in this country as rulers and especially the Moghuls, came directly under the influence of Hindu civilization and adopted some of the ancient customs and ways of the inhabitants of this land. Their Courts and the court manners received inspiration from the Hindu rulers of India. No wonder, therefore, that we find these Moslem monarchs evincing the same love for diamonds and jewels. Shah-e-Jehan made his well-known Peacock Throne in which thousands of jewels were studded. The price of the necklaces and ear-rings worn by the Moghul queens ran into millions. When one ruler sent any mission to another, he never forgot to send jewels as gifts as a token of goodwill. The Moghul rulers possessed some of the most costly jewels known to history and they played an important part in the history not only of this country, but in that of the neighbouring countries as well.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh's love of jewels is well-known. His collection was one of world wonders and to every one of his distinguished guests he showed his proud collection much to

their delight and admiration. From his son, the British got an invaluable collection, including the historical Koh-i-Noor, which now adorns the crown of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II of England. Whenever the British Viceroy visited the Indian states, their consorts were presented with jewels and diamond-necklaces, rings, ear-rings and various other precious stones, as a token of respect, goodwill and hospitality.

Thus the diamonds have played a very conspicuous part in the history of this ancient land. In early days, India was known as the home of diamond mines and to India belongs the proud privilege of having produced the priceless Koh-i-Noor, round which a thousand and one yarns have been weaved. It brought glory and victory to some and misery and agony to others. Wherever it went, it made history. Why is it that some of its proud possessors rose like meteors, after they got it and others sank down in oblivion, when it came to them? The reason is not far off to seek. According to Hindu science of precious stones, every stone does not suit every possessor. There are certain streaks of light inside the stones which run parallel or in contrast to the lines of fate of the wearer. If they are parallel, the wearer has victory and joy, if they do not, the possessor thereof is thrown into misery. Then, every kind of jewel does not fit in with every body. To some, diamonds bring joy and prosperity, to others pearls and to some rubies and so on. A diamond may

bring prosperity to one and utter ruin to another. So the Hindus of orthodox views always consult the experts in this line, before buying and wearing precious stones. If he advises pearls, they will wear pearls alone. This perhaps explains that Koh-i-Noor, the biggest and the brightest of diamonds yet known to history, brought victory and prosperity to some and ruin and destruction to others.

It would be interesting to know something about the diamond mines from one of which the Koh-i-Noor, according to some, was found. It had a legendary origin according to many, but without entering into any controversy on this point we would like to say something about the ancient mine of Koller the birth place of this historical diamond. It is not known to history when this mine was first opened. It is situated in the Deccan on the right bank of the river Kistna. Tavernier, who visited it during the middle of the 17th century says that it was opened only about one century before his visit, but this view of his, like many others of the same kind seems to be erroneous ; but we do not propose to enter into any discussion on this subject here. The very nature of the ground and the houses now found in ruins, easily prove that the mine has been working since very long—much longer than is known to history.

But as stated above, without starting any controversy, we would give here some idea to the reader as to how a mine was worked in

those days. It would not be out of place to quote Tavernier in this connection.

“At a distance of about seven days journey east of Golconda, there is another diamond mine called Gani¹ in the language of the country and colour in the Persian tongue. It is close to a large town on the same river which I crossed when coming from another mine, and at a league and a half from the town there are high mountains in the form of a cross. The space between the town and the mountain is covered by a plain where the mine is situated and the diamonds are found. The nearer one scortches towards the mountains, the larger the stones which are found, but when one ascends too high, nothing is found.

“It is about 100 years ago when a poor man digging a piece of ground where he proposed to sow millets, found a pointed nave (or cubic stone) weighing nearly 25 carats. This kind of stone being unknown to him and appearing remarkable, he carried it to Golconda and by

1. This mine has been identified in the Economic Geology of India, by the routes in Vol. I, 140 and Vol. II 73 with Koller in the Kistna, where according to a MS Map by Col. Mackenzie, there was a mine in 1798. The word Gani is equivalent to the Persian Kan-i signifying ‘mine of’. It is found in use by the present writers in connection with another mine namely Gani Partia, 1. It is the title of this mine most commonly used in works on numismatology and precious stones, sometimes considerably modified in spelling as Garee etc. But it can not be correctly used as the name of the mine where the great Moghul or any other diamond was found.

good luck addressed himself to one who traded in diamonds. The trader having ascertained from the peasant the place where he had found the stone was much surprised to see a diamond of such a weight, especially because the largest that had hitherto been seen did not exceed 10 to 12 carats.¹

“The rumours of this new discovery quickly spread abroad throughout the country and some persons of wealth in the town commenced to mine in this land where they found and where they still find large stones in great abundance. There are found here at present many stones from 10 upto 40 carats and some times indeed much larger. Among others there was the great diamond which weighed 900 carats, before cutting and which Mir Jumla presented to Aurangzeb, as I have elsewhere related.²

“But if this mine of Koller is of importance on account of the number of large stones, which are found there. it is a misfortune that as a rule these stones are not clear and that their water contains indications of the quality of the soil where they are found. If the soil is marshy and humid, the stone tends to blackness, if it

1. The statement is not correct. Larger diamonds did exist at that time.

2. This statement too is erroneous. The diamond was presented by Mir Jumla to Shah-e-Jehan and not to Aurangzeb (Elphinstone's History of India pp. 357 & 373). The weight as given by Tavernier himself elsewhere was 900 ratties or about $787\frac{1}{2}$ carats and not 900. In fact different people who saw it give different weights which fact has caused considerable confusion (See Taverniers Travels).

is reddish it tends to be red and with the other conditions, some times towards green, sometimes towards yellow, just as there is diversity of soil in the area between the town and the mountain. Upon the majority of these stones, after they are cut, there always appears a kind of grease which necessitates the carrying of a handkerchief in the hand of the holder in order to wipe them.

“As regards the waters of stones, it is to be remarked that instead of, as in Europe, employing daylight for the examination of stones in the rough (broles) and so carefully judging their water and any flaws which they may contain, the Indians do this at night; and they place them in a hole which they excavate in a wall, one foot square, a lamp with a large wick, by the light of which they judge of the water and the clearness of stones as they hold it between their fingers. The water which they term “celestial” (*Aab-i-Aasmani* or *Pani-i-Aasmani*) is the worst of all and it is impossible to ascertain whether it is present while the stone is in the rough. But though it may not be apparent on the mill, the never failing test for correctly ascertaining the water is afforded by taking the stone under a leafy tree, and in the green shadow one can easily detect if it is blue.

“The first time I was at this mine, there were nearly 60,000 persons working there, including men, women and children, who are employed in diverse ways; the men in digging, the women and children in carrying earth, for

they search for the stones at this mine; in altogether a different manner from that practised at Rammalakota.

“After the miners have selected the place, where they desire to work, they smooth down another spot close by, of equal or rather greater extent, round which they erect an enclosing wall of two feet in height.

“At the base of this little wall, they make openings, at every two feet, for the escape of the water, which they close till it is time for the water to be drawn off. This place being thus prepared, all who are about to engage in the search assemble men, women and children, together with their employer and a party of his relatives and his friends. He brings with him a figure in stone of the god whom they worship, which is placed standing on the ground, and each person prostrates himself three times before it, their priest, however offering up the prayers.¹

This prayer being finished, he makes a particular kind of marks upon the forehead of each one with a paste composed of saffron and gum, in order that it may sustain seven or eight grains of rice, which he places upon it. Then they wash their bodies with the water which each of them carries in a vessel and sit down in ranks to eat that which is presented at the feast given by their employer at the

1. This prayer is an appeal for protection from the Mine spirits, which are much dreaded—see Crooke: Popular Religion and Folk Lore of Northern India I, 282 f.

beginning of their work, in order to give them courage and induce them to acquit themselves faithfully. This feast merely consists of a portion of rice to each, which is distributed by a Brahmin, because every idolator can eat what is served to him by the hands of priests. Some among them are so superstitious that they will not eat, what is prepared even by their own wives and prefer to cook for themselves. The plate upon which the rice is placed is made of leaves of a tree pinned together; to some extent it resembles the leaves of our walnut trees. To each there is also given about a quarter of a pound of melted butter in a little cup of copper with some sugar.

“When the dinner is finished, each of them starts work, the men excavate the earth and women and children to carry it to the place which has been prepared as I have said above. They excavate upto 10, 12 or 14 feet in depth. but when they reach water, there is nothing more to hope for. All the earth is carried to this place; men, women and children draw water with pitchers from the hole which they have excavated and throw it upon the earth, which they have placed there in order to soften it. leaving it in this state for one or two days according to the tenacity of the clay until it becomes like soup. This done, they open the holes which they had made in the wall to let off water, then they throw on more, so that all the shine may be removed and nothing remain but sand. It is a kind of clay

which requires to be washed two or three times. They then leave it to be dried by the sun, which is quickly effected by the great heat. They have a particular kind of basket made something like a winnowing fan, in which they place the earth, which they agitate as we do, when winnowing grain. The fine part is blown away and the coarse stuff, which remains is subsequently replaced on the ground.

“All the earth having been thus winnowed, they spread it with a rake and make it as level as possible. Then they all stand together on the earth each with a large beton of wood like a huge pestle, half a foot wide at the base and pound the earth, going from one end to the other always pounding each part two or three times ; then they place it again in the baskets and winnow it, as they did on the first occasion, after which they spread it out again and range themselves on one side to handle the earth and search for diamonds, in which process they adopt the same method as at Rammalakota. Formerly, instead of using wooden pestles for pounding the earth, they pounded it with stones and it was that method which produced so many flaws in the diamonds.”

CHAPTER II

Legendary Origin of the Koh-i-Noor

This wonder diamod of India, with its chequered history running into thousands of years and which later on came to be known as Koh-i-Noor, had a legendary origin. It is indeed very difficult to prove by un-impeachable historical evidence that the great diamond of which we read in the *Puranas* and other ancient scriptures of the Hindus, was the same which later on played such an important part in our country's history : but from the extra-ordinary size, unsurpassed brilliance, and other distinguishing features of the different diamonds about which we read in the narratives of the various periods, one can reasonably reconcile their identity. It is true that there is difference in the weight and size given in the various records available, and it raises doubts and even confusion ; but we should not attach any great importance to this, as we cannot lose sight of the fact that the different weights have actually differed in the various periods and various parts of India. Thus a *seer* or *chattak* of the present times differs from a *seer* or a *chattak* prevalent about quarter of a century back. These weights during the Moghul period varied even more. So inspite of this difference in the weight or size, which at times is strikingly conspicuous, one can safely agree with the view that in fact this great diamond

has an unbroken and continuous history, though some of its links are lost in antiquity and unsettled conditions of this ancient land.

Bhagwat Puran connects it with the Sun-God, who imparted to it his own brilliance and lustre. One Satrajit, a devotee of the Sun God, pleased him so much by his austerities and charities, that the Sun God gave this wonderful diamond to his '*bhagta*' as a gift.¹ Its possession meant wealth and prosperity. Satrajit became so rich that he began to distribute large quantities of gold to the Brahmins every day. This attracted the attention of others and they began to cast covetous glances on this wonderful possession of the Sun God's devotee. His brother Persain suggested to him that this precious gift should be passed on to Raja Uggar Sen, the ruler of Muttra, because he alone of all men was best fitted to be in its possession. How could Satrajit agree to such a suggestion ?

Persain who seems to have been determined to dispossess his brother of the diamond, took his opportunity and snatched it from his elder brother. Without delay he started for Muttra to gain the favour of his potentate, by presenting to him this extra-ordinary gift of the Sun God. He was, however, not destined to attain his object, as he was killed by a lion in a jungle through which he was passing. Hearing the

1. It was known at that time as Samantick-Mani. Mani is a Sanskrit word meaning diamond. A reference to it is made in *Vishnu-Purana* as also in *Bhagwat Purana*.

hue and cry of Persain, one Jamavant, a warrior of celebrated brawn and great reputation, came to his rescue ; but too late. He noticed the diamond of extra-ordinary brilliance and took it away with him.¹

Persain was a near relative of Lord Krishna. The former's sudden disappearance gave rise to many wild stories and there were whispers in quarters antagonistic to Lord Krishna, that it was he who was at the bottom of this mysterious disappearance of Persain along with the Sun God's diamond. Whispers soon turned into definite allegations and Satrajit openly accused the Lord of his complicity in this crime. To set all such rumours at rest, Krishna set out in search of Persain and the diamond. He heard stories about Jamavant's possession of a precious stone with extra-ordinary brilliance and went to take it back from him, but all in vain. Jamavant was deaf to reason. All appeals fell flat on him and he stubbornly refused to part with his valuable possession.

Enraged at this, Lord Krishna challenged Jamavant to a deadly duel which lasted for twenty-seven days. At last the renowned warrior was over-powered and he humbly capitulated. Not only was the precious diamond returned, but Jamavant's only daughter Jama-wati was given away in marriage to Lord Krishna. Thus was the great gift of the Sun God restored to his devotee Satrajeet. When

1. See Bhagwat Purana, Page 246.

he got it back he was over-joyed ; but he was ashamed to have accused such a noble soul as Lord Krishna for nothing. He now wanted to do penance for the great wrong which he had done to him. In consultation with his wife, he hit out a plan. Going to Lord Krishna bare-footed, he humbly requested him to accept the hand of his daughter Satyabhama in marriage. She was renowned for her beauty and charm of manners. Lord Krishna accepted the proposal of his penitent relative and the marriage was solemnized. This well-known diamond was given in dowry.¹ Though Lord Krishna was now its rightful owner, and he was in everyway pre-eminently fitted to retain the prize, yet he did not deem it fit to keep it with him. So he gave it back to the Sun God who in turn bestowed it on Raja Karna, whose God-father he was.

Karna was a shining light of the great galaxy which had gathered round Duryodhana, the celebrated Kaurava King². He had many precious stones in his possession. His courtly robes and even his armour were studded with well-known diamonds, jewels and rubies. This gift from his God-father now adorned his crown. In the great war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, fought on the plains of Kurukushetra and which is regarded as one of the bloodiest battles ever fought ; Karna who was leading the armies of Duryodhana as Commander-in-

1. Bhagwat Purana, page 253.

2. Mahabhartar : Dutts' translation. Page 786.

Chief, was killed in action by Arjuna, the ace-warrior of the Pandavas. It is worth noting here that the chariot of Arjuna in this war was driven by Lord Krishna.

When Karna fell in the battlefield his armour, crown and weapons all fell to Arjuna. So this great diamond passed on from Karna to Arjuna.

When the war was over after eighteen days of severest fighting, the Pandavas, came out victorious. The eldest of the Pandavas, Raja Yudhishtira was crowned King and Arjuna, his younger brother, presented this diamond to him as a token of his affection and homage.¹ Thus it came into the hands of the rulers of Indra Prastha.

There is yet another story as to how the diamond came into the possession of Yudhishtira, head of the Pandava dynasty and strangely enough it relates to the same period. According to this source Bhuri Sharava, the ruler of Kashmir, had the proud privilege to possess this diamond of unrivalled lustre. He used to wear it on his right arm, not only as a priceless ornament but also as a sign of good omen, as it was believed that its owner could not come to any harm. It was also considered to be a procurer of good fortune, fame and prosperity. When the great war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas began on the his-

(1) Mahabhartā : Dutt's Translation. Page 1870.

torical battle ground of Kuru-Kshetra, Raja Bhuri Sharava joined the ranks of Duryodhana, the king of Kauravas. When the two armies got arrayed against one another and the different commanders took positions to begin the deadly combat, this diamond was sparkling conspicuously on the arm of its proud possessor. Raja Bhuri Sharava a warrior of great merit, showed remarkable feats of bravery and created awe in the ranks of the Pandavas. It was believed that he was able to achieve this distinction on account of this diamond, the wearer of which could not be overcome in the battle-field. A small council of the Pandava leaders took place and after hurried consultations, it was decided to depute Arjuna, the ace-warrior on the side of the Pandavas, to face the Raja of Kashmir. The combat between the two was terrible and marvellous feats of archery, swordsmanship and boxing were witnessed by astonished on-lookers, who beheld the almost impossible sight of Arjuna being brought to bay, by the Raja of Kashmir. It was feared that Arjuna would lose the battle, which would turn the tables on the Pandavas. For a moment it was thought that all was lost. Suddenly the charioteer of Arjuna, who was Lord Krishna himself, whispered something into the ears of the Pandava warrior, who composed himself, took out his un-failing bow and aimed at the right arm of Bhuri Shrava. His aim was flawless and in the twinkling of an eye, the right arm of the ruler of Kashmir flew into the air, alongwith

the diamond-studded armlet. Arjuna now had no difficulty in completely overpowering him. Thus it was that Arjuna came into possession of this wonder diamond, which he presented to his elder brother Yudhishtira, when he was crowned King after winning the great war of Mahabharata.

After ruling for a few years Raja Yudhishtira got tired of the worldly life and decided to abdicate in favour of Yuvraj Parikshit, the grandson of Arjuna. The young prince was crowned king and at the coronation ceremony this diamond was presented to him by Yudhishtira. From Parikshit it passed on to his son Janmejya and so it changed hands from sire to son. Peace reigned for a long time, under the powerful successors of the Pandavas and consequently, we do not hear anything worth mentioning about it during this long period. In fact nothing was heard about it for centuries together.

CHAPTER III

In the hands of the Hindu Kings

We hear very little about the diamond after the reign of the Pandavas. In fact we have got no legendary or historical data of the intervening period and no links can be found to trace its career. With the passing of time the great Kingdom of the Kauravas was split up into small principalities. It is believed, however, that the rulers of Jaipur, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Mewar, Kashmir, Punjab and other such states were the descendants of Raja Janmeja of the Pandava dynasty.

There is nothing on record from which to know about the activities of these petty rulers and we find no evidence to connect any-one of these with the diamond. Though there are not a few who doubt that Raja Porus,¹ the ruler of the Punjab, was a direct descendant of the Pandavas, yet recent researches reveal that this proud potentate who refused to humble himself before Alexandar the Great, even when vanquished, was connected with Raja Janmeja, the Pandava King of Indra Prastha. This enlightened ruler, who administered his kingdom on democratic lines, was very popular among his subjects. They fought so valiantly besides their ruler that the Grecian hordes

1. Raja Parikshat by A. B. Pushkarna, Page 160.

under Alexander, were about to flee, when a stroke of fortune turned the scales in favour of the invaders. The elephant which Porus was riding got frightened and began to run wildly and the forces thought that their leader was killed. They lost their ground and began to run helter-skelter. Porus was taken prisoner. When he was brought as such before Alexander, he proudly inquired of his vanquished foe 'Now what treatment should be accorded to you' "Treatment"? retorted Porus, with his head erect, "Treatment, which befits a King to accord to a King". Alexander who had already been greatly impressed by the spirit and valour of the King's armies was pleased with this apt and proud reply of Porus. He embraced him and became his friend. All his possessions were returned to him. Thus the great and priceless diamond which would have fallen into the hands of the Greek conqueror and would have thus left the shores of India, was saved and remained with Porus as one of his proud possessions. This happened in 325 B. C.

From 325 B. C. to 297 B. C. Chandra Gupta Morya ruled over the major portion of India. His grandson Ashoka, who extended his Empire from North to South and from East to West, so that it comprised of almost the whole of India, ascended the throne in 273 B. C. The history of his descendants is again lost in darkness and no definite clues are obtainable. This much is known that after the death of Ashoka

his Empire was split up into small principalities over which his sons and grandsons ruled. One of them named Raja Samprati, believed to be one of Ashoka's grandsons, made Ujjain his capital. The diamond in question passed on to this ruler as his valuable possession.

With the passing of time, Ujjain changed hands with various rulers and dynasties, all of which remained in possession of the diamond. Chandra Gupta, better known as Vikramaditya, the founder of the Vikrama era of the Hindus, attacked Ujjain, which was at that time being ruled by Shakas and annexed it to his Empire. All the jewels, including this famous diamond fell into Vikramaditya's hands. After his death the Gupta dynasty was badly battered by the continued attacks of the Huns. There was chaos in the country for a long period afterwards, except for a short interval between 606 A. D. and 647 A. D., when Raja Harsha formed some sort of a Central Government with a systematic administration. His death was again a signal for lawlessness and his vast kingdom was broken into pieces. Raja Lalit Dittya established a new kingdom in Kashmir. He organised a strong army and annexed Tibbet, Kanauj, Magadh, Orissa, Assam, Gujrat, Malwa, and Ujjain. His empire extended over the whole of northern India.

The break up of one empire after another and fall of different dynasties, none of which could establish themselves sufficiently, failed to give to the people some sort of a continued Govern-

ment for any appreciable length of time. An adventurer appeared here or there, gathered a number of soldiers around him, established his sway over some area and declared himself a King. If he was able to extend his territory by overpowering his neighbours, he was able to form even an empire. Lack of homogeneity, and any common tie in the shape of some ideal or patriotic fervour prevented him to weld the various sections, clans and tribes into an organic body, able to inspire either confidence or feelings of loyalty in the masses. People reorganised no other bond than that of tribes or region and in most cases it was all a question of personal loyalty to this leader or that, according to the degree of power he wielded to enforce his will. Petty rivalries between the different clans and their heads, kept the country in a state of turmoil for a long time. Might was right and any one who could muster sufficient courage and gather the necessary strength could get himself recognised as the overlord. For a time he ruled supreme and then either in his life-time or during that of anyone of his weak successors, the intriguing elements succeeded in their plots to bring to an end the achievement of his ambition. Chieftains changed sides with the ease of partners at a game of cards and any one who could pay was able to buy their loyalty and support. Thus the Hindu rulers of Hindustan sapped their power and frittered away their energies in fratricidal war-fares. They not only weakened Hindustan as a whole; but weakened themselves too.

Those who were humbled and defeated sought to wreak vengeance by fair means or foul. When they could not get success from inside, they began to look outside for help.

Stories of the fabulous wealth of Hindustan had reached the freebooters on its North Western Frontier. They had been casting covetous glances on the country since a long time; but repute of India's valourous warriors and their feats of bravery had been keeping them in check. When they found that Hindustan had become a house divided against itself and some chiefs were inviting them for loot and plunder, they seized this opportunity of amassing wealth. Sultan Mahmood of Ghazni was the first to invade the country. He did so seventeen times returning each time laden with gold, jewels and valuables of all sorts. His targets of attacks were either the wealthy capitals of Rajput tribes or places of Hindu worship, from where he was able to plunder booty worth crores of rupees. His loot of Somnath, the well-known centre of Hindu worship, yielded the richest plunder in shape of gold and gems and jewels.

After Mahmood of Ghazni came Mohd. Ghaurie. He was defeated by Prithvi Raj Chauhan at Tarawari. Prithvi Raj's cousin Jai Chand, who was jealous of his power and splendour, later on joined hands with Ghaurie and became the cause of Chauhan's overthrow. Sultan Ghaurie consolidated his power and subsequently turned upon Jai Chand and vanquished

this traitor. A large booty fell to him. We, however, do not hear of the famous diamond in these discourses. Where was this priceless diamond ? No mention is made of it in the rich plunders of either Ghaznvi or Ghauree. Had it fallen into their hands, certainly the fact would have been brought to light by historians.

But no; this famous diamond never fell into their hands. When the invasions became frequent and the invaders' greed proved insatiable, it was smuggled out to Malwa where Parmar dynasty was in power. The Diamond was bequeathed from one ruler to another in succession as one of their most treasured possessions. The last one to possess it was Raja Ram Dev.

CHAPTER IV

With the Muslim Rulers

Towards the close of the thirteenth century Alaud-din-Khilji ascended the throne of India after murdering his uncle Jalal-ud-Din in cold blood. He was a man of warlike nature and loved adventure. Soon after he assumed the reins of power he began attacking the neighbouring principalities and kingdoms, with a view not only to extend his empire but also to acquire riches. In the year 1306 A. D. he attacked Malwa and besieged Arangal, its Capital. The besieged armies of Malwa, defended the city heroically and inflicted terrible loss on the invaders ; but they could not hold on for long as they were hopelessly outnumbered. Finding it impossible to resist any more, they opened the gates of the city to the invading armies.

The rulers of Malwa had collected jewels, gold, diamonds, rubies and other precious articles of every description worth crores of rupees. All the accumulated wealth of theirs thus fell to the conqueror. Allauddin was overjoyed to see himself the master of such fortunes, including some precious stones of rare qualities. Amongst them was this diamond of great repute. Amir Khusro gives a graphic account of how these valuable jewels were surrendered to Allauddin. He writes thus : “Rai Ladhar

Deo shut himself inside the fort, like a snake over buried treasure, and called his people around him. He had fastened his hopes on a plan to place before the invaders an obstacle which would cause them to stumble and retrace their steps, but the Emperor's prestige over-awed him. All his courage melted away and he was left a broken man. In his helplessness, he first collected in heaps, the treasure he had buried under stones, more heavy than can be dragged from the hills, in order to provide for his ransom. Next he constructed a golden image of himself and in acknowledgement of having become a tribute-payer, he placed a golden chain round its neck and sent it through ambassadors whose honest word was more unchanging than the purest gold, to the commander of the Imperial Army.

"In his petition the Rai submitted that 'If precious stones, gems and pearls are demanded, I have a stock of them such as the eyes of the mountains have not seen and the ears of the fish have not heard. All of these will be scattered in the path of the Imperial Officers.'

"The boxes carried out to the victorious army on the backs of finest of elephants, with trappings ornamented with the purest of gold and most brilliant jewels, were full of valuables and gems, the excellence of which drove the on-lookers mad.

"The diamonds would have penetrated into an iron-heart like an arrow of steel and yet

owing to their delicate nature would have been shattered by the stroke of a hammer.

“When the Rai had sent through his clever ambassadors all that he had received by way of inheritance from his ancestors, the Ariz-i-Mamalik (Khawja Haji) went to examine the jewels. After clarifying them he thus addressed the ambassadors, ‘Tell me as all the gems of the Rai are excellent, has he sent the best of them hither?’

“By the God who has created man, the finest of substances,” swore the ambassadors, “each of these jewels is of a kind of which no man can calculate the value. And among them is a jewel unparalleled in the whole world though according to perfect philosophers such a substance cannot exist.”¹

From this stage upto the time of Babar the history of the great diamond is once more lost in obscurity. It is very strange that though the philosophers and the tribal leaders of those times were fully conversant with the worth and value of this precious stone of unrivalled brilliance and extra-ordinary size, no one took into his head to record its history. This much alone

1. This is the famous Koh-i-Noor which according to many writers including Khafi Khan was brought by Ala-ud-Din's army from the Deccan (See Memoirs of Babar by Erskire p. 308). “Though logicians,” to put the ambassadors' words in a different form, “declare that there is no such thing as a unique substance, except the Divine Being, yet the (Kohinoor) diamond has no peer and stands in a class by itself. You cannot find a diamond to match it in the whole world.” (translation)

can be said that it did remain in the possession of the Sultans of Delhi. Khilji dynasty was followed by Tughlaks and they in turn were succeeded by the Syeds. The last king of that dynasty Ala-ud-Din Syed, who was a pious and God-loving man, gave the reins of his kingdom into the hands of Bahlol Lodhi, Governor of the Punjab, and himself retired to lead a life of devotion. The diamond was not in their possession, as we find that when Ibrahim Lodhi was defeated at the battle of Panipat, it was recovered from Agra where it had been deposited by Raja Vikramaditya of Gwalior.

How did it pass away from the hands of the Sultans of Delhi is not known. There is no record to throw light on this episode. In fact there are some who believe that it did not pass into the hands of Tughlaks, at all, because we find sufficiently detailed records of the times of Mohammed Tughlak and his successors. When Amir Taimoor descended on the plains of India with his gangs of freebooters and reached upto Delhi during the reign of Mahmood Tughlak he plundered Delhi for full five days. There was not a single house which was not broken into and ransacked. The streets of Delhi were flooded with the blood of many innocent men, women and children who were slaughtered in cold blood. For fifteen days Taimoor stayed in Delhi and during all this time his armies were busy in loot and plunder, all of which was handed to their leader. All the jewels, gold and valuables of the Royal family, the chieftains and the

courtiers as well as of the common citizens, fell into his hands. Had this diamond been in the possession of the ruler of Delhi at that time, it could not have escaped falling into the hands of Taimoor. There are sufficiently detailed accounts available of the loot of Delhi and the invasion of Taimoor and they are authenticated too, but we find no mention of the diamond. From this it can be naturally concluded that it was not in the possession of the Tughlaks. It is just possible that having heard of Taimoor's invasion, Mahmood might have passed it on to some one of his Rajput allies but it would be a mere conjecture as we find no historical evidence to support it.

CHAPTER V

Koh-i-Noor leaves India

Abraham Lodhi who succeeded his father Sikandar was very unpopular on account of his cruel disposition. He was vain, stubborn and suspicious. In a very short time his own courtiers became tired of him, turned against him and sent an invitation to Babar, the king of Kabul, to invade India. They told him of the fabulous riches of Hindustan and held out prospects of an extremely rich booty. Babar was tempted by these offers and hopes and crossed the Indus with twelve thousand tried soldiers and seven hundred guns. Abraham called one lac army with one thousand elephants and the two armies met at Panipat in 1526 A. D. A very fierce battle began. The elephants of Abraham got frightened by the explosion of the guns of Babar and began to run helter-skelter. This caused panic and the armies of Lodhi began to flee in all directions. He himself was killed in action and Babar came out victorious. He declared himself Emperor of India.

In this battle Raja Vikramaditya of Gwalior fought on the side of Abraham Lodhi. Before going to the battlefield, he sent all his jewels to the fort of Agra of which he was the *Qiladar*. Vikramaditya himself was slain in the battlefield. When this sad news reached Agra,

his family and nobles prepared to flee from Agra to some place of security ; but before they could put their plans into action, all the roads were blockaded by the soldiers. Humayun, the son of Babar, had been deputed by his father to hasten to Agra, in order to take possession of all the possessions of the Raja. He seems to have got clue of the fact that valuable treasure was hidden in the fort of Agra. Before Humayun reached the place, his victorious soldiers had begun to plunder and loot. He was a man of benevolent disposition and soft temper. He atonce issued strict orders that no one was to be molested in any way. He treated the women and children of the late Raja in a most courteous and kind manner and assured them that they would not be maltreated in any way. As a token of their appreciation of this graceful action of Humayun, they presented to him many valuable diamonds and jewels. Amongst them was included this historical diamond. Humayun made a present of this wonderful gift to Babar.

Another view is that the diamond was made over to Humayun by the mother of Abraham Lodhi. According to this version, Abraham was slain on the battlefield of Panipat and Humayun was deputed to take possession of the treasure of the late King. He ransacked the whole of the Royal Treasury, but did not come across the historical diamond. All the household servants and treasury officers were closely questioned by the Prince on the

point, but all of them kept mum. They were threatened with dire consequences, but none came forward even then to give him the requisite information. At last one of the servants pointed his fingers towards the Royal Palace. When Humayun entered it, he found ladies of the Royal family sobbing and weeping. Humane, as the young prince was, he could not bear this pathetic sight. His heart melted and tears began to trickle down his cheeks. He assured the ladies that their honour would be safe in his hands and he would look after them in a way worthy of their high rank. The afflicted ladies of the Royal household were thus consoled and composed themselves.

It was then that Humayun asked the mother of Abraham Lodhi to give him the diamond for which he had come. Without speaking a word the old lady went inside a room and brought with her a gold box which she gave to the young prince with trembling hands. Humayun opened the box and from inside he got out the diamond wrapped in many layers of velvet. Beholding the extraordinary brilliance of the jewel, Humayun was dazed.

This story, however, is not supported by historical evidence and all the authorities support the version that it was recovered from the Agra Fort, occupied by the family of Raja Vikramaditya of Gwalior. Writing about it, Babar thus says in his Memoirs : "Apparently it weighs

eight miskats.¹ Humayun offered it to me as a '*peshkash*' when I arrived at Agra and I just gave it back to him as a present."

In 1530, Hamayun fell dangerously ill. No amount of medical aid was of any avail. When no hope of his recovery was left, one Mir Ata Baqa suggested that the dearest possession of Babar should be sacrificed to save the life of the Prince. Babar said that his dearest possession was his son and even dearer to one was his own life. So he would sacrifice his own life to save that of his son. This sent a wave of disappointment and depression amongst his courtiers. They conferred amongst themselves and suggested to the Emperor that what Baqa meant was that some worldly possession dearest

1. The value of this priceless diamond has been estimated by the writers according to their own peculiar ways, but all of them are agreed as to its rarity. Some say that its value is equivalent to the price of one and a half day's food of the whole world. Others put it at the daily expenses of the whole world for one day.

As to its weight, Memoirs of Babar put it at 8 Miskats and one Miskat is equal to 40 ratties. According to Farishta, one Miskat is equal to 28 ratties. So according to him, the weight comes to 224 ratties; 320 ratties according to some. 320 ratties are equal to 187 carats. Gorshia de Orta says that a carat is equal to 4 grains and a ratti is equal to 3 grains. Tavernier, however, thinks that a ratti is equal to $\frac{7}{8}$ of a carat. Another view is that carat equals $\frac{3}{8}$ ratties or 3 grains and 156 carats make one ounce or 3 tolas. Whatever be the difference in the various versions as to the weight and value of this demand, it cannot be denied that it was a priceless prize that fell into the hands of the Moghuls.

and most precious to him should be sacrificed. They said that the most precious possession of the Emperor was the priceless diamond, which fell into his hands from Abrahim Lodhi. Babar, however, did not agree and said that his most precious possession was his own life.

The story says that Babar went round the bed of his sick son several times, then prayed to God in a most devout manner to spare the life of his son and to take away his own in his stead. From that very moment Humayun began to recover and Babar's sickness began to grow from bad to worse. Babar died and Humayun recovered.

From the time when this unique diamond came into the possession of Humayun, it emerged out of obscurity and came into lime light for ever. From this period upto the present time there is an unbroken chain of events connected with it and there is no dearth of historical evidence to support the various interesting episodes with which its chequered career is replete. Humayun was very fond of this invaluable possession and never parted with it, even in his darkest days. An interesting story is related by the well-known historian Abul Fazal in his 'Akbarname', about the attempts made to make him part with it. Sher Shah Suri who had established a strong kingdom of his own, decided to oust Humayun out of power with a view to extend his own empire in the whole of Northern India. His army of Afghans gave much trouble to the Moghul Emperor who was

routed in his last stand against the forces of Sher Shah in the year 1540 A. D. Humayun fled towards Multan a disappointed man. His empire which was built by his late father and himself, had slipped out of his hands and he was now a fugitive clinging to the vain hope of securing help from any ruler of some Rajput clan or from the Muslim Governor of Sind. He was sorely disappointed in this, because no one liked to incur the displeasure of the Afghan army which was busy in pursuing the fugitive king. He was fleeing from one place to another for the sake of his dear life. He entered the domain of Marwar which was being ruled by Raja Maldev at that time. He had hoped to get some help from him, but when Humayun reached his state, he found that the Raja was favourably disposed towards Sher Shah, who having defeated Humayun, had now become to be looked at as the Emperor of India. Not only did the Raja refuse to side with him, but he added insult to injury by trying to deprive him of this diamond. Taking advantage of his miserable plight, the Raja offered to buy the priceless diamond from him and actually sent one of his courtiers, disguised as a diamond merchant, to strike a bargain with him. When he presented himself in the camp of the fugitive king and made known the purpose of his visit, Humayun was enraged. He, however, controlled his feelings and retorted: "Such precious gems cannot be obtained by purchases; either they fall to one by the arbitrament of the flashing sword, which is an expression of Divine

Will or else they come through the grace of mighty monarchs." Hearing this the disguised diamond merchant quietly departed. After this episode Humayun lost all hopes of regaining his empire. So he left the country along with the diamond which for the first time in its history left the soil of India.

His way lay through Sistan and Herat. After enduring many a hardship in the way, Humayun at last reached Persia with a few followers who remained faithful to the last. The Shah of Persia received him cordially and extended to him his royal hospitality which Humayun enjoyed for full fourteen years. Shah Tebmasp showed him kindness and treated him in a manner which made such a deep impression on the fugitive king that he, as a token of his gratitude, presented him a number of invaluable jewels including his most treasured possession—the historical Koh-i-Noor. The price of these jewels and diamonds more than repaid the total expenses incurred by the Shah during all these fourteen long years.

The Shah was very much pleased to have this extra-ordinary diomond but seems to have taken no fancy for the same. May be that because he got the priceless gift without any ado or may be that he could not realize that the diamond was the only one of its kind in existence, he did not keep it with himself and deposited it in his treasury where it remained for a long time.

In those days the King of Persia being a

Shia ruler was regarded as their head by the rulers of Ahmednagar, Bijapur and Golconda; three principalities which had been built on the ruins of the well-known Bahamni Kingdom of the Deccan. The rulers of these principalities were Shias and as such they were always harassed by the Sunni Emperor of Delhi. The Moghuls were always anxious to crush these small principalities and attempts to do so lasted upto the reign of Aurangzeb who was at last able to realize the dreams of his ancestors.

Thus the Shah of Persia was not only regarded as the religious Head of the Shias of these principalities, but was also looked upon as an ally in times of need. So very cordial and close relations existed between them. Ambassadors and presents were exchanged between them. In 1547, the Shah sent one Aqa Islam 'Mehtar Jamal' as an ambassador to Burhan Nizam Shah of Ahmednagar (Deccan). Through him presents of jewels and diamonds were also sent and it is believed that amongst them was the Diamond given by Humayun to Shah Tehmasp. Thus it returned to India, the land of its origin. This is corroborated by Farishta in his account of Burhan Nizam Shah.

CHAPTER VI

Back in the hands of Moghuls

Mir Jumla, a diamond dealer of great repute in Persia, came to India in connection with his business. He was a master of his trade and possessed uncommon knowledge about diamonds and diamond mines. The fact that India was reputed for its diamond mines and diamonds of unrivalled lustre and brilliance caught his fancy and he landed on the shores of this historic country in pursuit of his trade. Destiny, however, was weaving another pattern for him, for even though a foreigner he was destined to play an important part in the intriguing politics of this country.

Some people have erroneously identified him with Mehtar Jamal about whom we have read in the previous chapter. The confusion is caused by a similarity in the two names. We, however, find that the latter was sent to the Court of Nizam Shah of Ahmednagar as an ambassador by the Shah of Persia in 1547. Of Mir Jumla we hear for the first time in the forties of the seventeenth century. He lived upto the year 1663. If we take him as the ambassador to Nizam Shah then this would mean that he lived upto 150 years of age, which in itself is sufficient to prove that the two were not identical persons. This longevity, though not impos-

sible can safely be regarded as improbable, taking into consideration the average age of those days, which was something about 68 years.

Mir Jumla was a man of parts. He possessed wonderful talents both for civil and military administration. Besides by means of his fabulous wealth which he had acquired as a diamond merchant, he became very influential at the Court and soon got interested in the court intrigues. Sultan Abdullah Qutab Shah of Golconda was so much impressed by his attainments that he appointed him as his Prime Minister. He acquitted himself very admirably in that post of great responsibility and the state took very rapid strides towards progress. Mir Jumla side by side with his administration of the State, did not fail to mind his own private business, which he developed taking advantage of his high position. He was put in sole charge of the working of the diamond mines of Golconda and his deep knowledge of this trade gave him great opportunities which none else could exploit. In addition, he was granted vast Jagirs by the Sultan. This also gave him a chance to improve his financial position. In a short time he became possessed of fabulous riches. With his wealth increased his influence, and people began to look upto him rather than to the Sultan for the redress of their grievances. This made his master jealous of him and he conspired to blind him. The wily minister, however, was

not to be caught napping. This plot to blind him was reported to him and before it could mature Mir Jumla was out of the Sultan's reach. The latter was enraged when he discovered that the bird had flown. He was helpless to do anything as the minister had gone out of his jurisdiction. Mir Jumla's vast lands and valuable property were all confiscated.

At this period Aurangzeb had been appointed the Governor of Deccan by his father Shah Jehan, the well-known Moghul Emperor, who has made his name immortal by constructing the famous Taj Mahal. The young Governor had always been entertaining designs against the independent states of Deccan. In the breach between Golconda and his able Minister Mir Jumla, he saw his own opportunity. He tried to win over the latter to his side and held before him attractive hopes of his rising at the Moghul Court with all his intelligence and administrative experience. He readily agreed to serve the Imperial Government and as a first favour from the Moghul Court, he got back his confiscated property from the Sultan of Golconda, on whom great pressure was put for this purpose by the Emperor himself.

Coupled with his remarkable ability and consummate skill as an administrator of great parts, Mir Jumla brought with him a large collection of diamonds and jewels, which was the talk of the Moghul Court. In his 'Voyages des Indes', Thevenat, the well-known Voyager says: "Mir Jumla possessed 20 maunds or 408 Dutch

lires weight of diamonds. He had acquired these diamonds when at the head of the army of Golconda he made war with the King of Bijapur against Bisnagar. Bernier, however, is of the opinion that he acquired his fabulous wealth in many other ways too. He caused the diamond mines which he alone had got on lease under many borrowed names to be wrought with extra-ordinary diligence so that people discovered of nothing but the riches of Mir Jumla and of the plenty of his diamonds, which were reckoned out by sacks”.

On his arrival at the court of Shah Jehan, Mir Jumla was received with great honour and distinction. At this reception, he presented this remarkable diamond to the Emperor. Thus it once again came back into the possession of the Moghul Emperor. Describing the ceremony of Mir Jumala's presentation at the Moghul Court, William Jessop, an agent of the East India Company at Surat, who was at that moment present at Agra on a business errand remarks :—“Mir Jumla upon his arrival into the presence of the King, was courteously received by him, entertained and made Dewan and was given by His Majesty two elephants, 202 lackeys and five lacs of rupees for his expenses, he presenting the King with a diamond un-cut weighing 160 ratties (incorrect weight) besides other precious stones of great value, which he still continues to do”. The letter in which this description is given is dated 15th August 1656.

Another description of this event is given by Bernier in his travels into the Moghul Empire. He says "Jumla, who had by his address contrived to obtain frequent invitations at the Court of Shah Jehan, repaired at length to Agra and carried the most magnificent presents in the hope of inducing the Moghul Emperor to declare war against the Kings of Golconda and Bijapur and against the Portuguese. It was on this occasion that he presented Shah Jehan with that celebrated diamond which has been generally deemed unparalleled in size and beauty. He dilaected with earnestness on the benefits which would accrue from the conquest of Golconda, whose precious stones were surely more deserving of his consideration than the rocks of Kandhar, wither the Moghul Emperor was about to lead an army; his military operations in that Kingdom ought not to cease, he said, until the conquest of his armies extended to Cape Comorin".

Another distinguished writer, Muhammad Warris, who is regarded as an authority on the third decade of Shah Jehan's reign writes thus in the third volume of his famous "Badshah-nama": "On the 18th of Safar 1066 A.C. (17th December 1655 A.D.), Mir Mohammad said that Mir Jumla 'Jumlatul Mulki', 'Muazzam Khan' the newly appointed Prime Minister offered to Shah Jehan as a '*peshkash*' precious jewels including a large diamond weighing 9 tanks or 216 surkhs, the price of which was fixed by the Royal order at Rs. 2,15,000".

The historic diamond was consigned in the Royal Treasury and after the death of Shah Jehan, it passed on into the hands of Aurangzeb who succeeded to the throne of his father after putting him into prison and slaying his two elder brothers. Aurangzeb was not fond of pomp and show like his father; so this diamond of unrivalled beauty and splendour remained consigned into the coffers of the Moghul Treasury for the major portions of the time. Tavernier had an opportunity to see it and gives an interesting description of it. He says: "On the first day of November 1665, I went to the palace to take leave of the Emperor but he said that he did not wish me to depart without having seen his jewels and witnessing the splendour of his state. Early in the morning of the next day, five or six of the Emperor's officers and others on behalf of Nawab Jafar Khan announced that the Emperor wished to see me.

"Immediately on my arrival at the Court, the two custodians of the royal jewels, of whom I have spoken elsewhere, accompanied me into the presence of His Majesty and after I had made him the customary salutations, they conducted me into a small apartment, which is at one of the ends of the Hall, where the Emperor was seated on his throne and whence he was able to see us. I found in the apartment Akil Khan, chief of the Jewel treasury who, when he saw us, commanded four of the imperial eunuchs to bring the jewels which were

carried in two large wooden trays, lacquered with gold leaf and covered with small clothes made expressly for the purpose—one of red and the other of green embroidered velvet. After these trays were uncovered, and all the pieces had been counted three times over, a list was prepared by three scribes who were present. For the Indians do everything with great circumspection and patience, and when they see anyone who acts with precipitation or becomes angry, they gaze at him without saying anything and smile as if he were a madman.

“The first piece which Akil Khan placed in my hands was the great diamond, which is a round rose very light at one side. At the brasal margin it has a small notch and flaw inside. Its water is beautiful and it weighs $319\frac{1}{2}$ ratties, which are equal to 280 of our carats—the ratti being $\frac{7}{8}$ of our carat. When Mir Jumla who betrayed the King of Golconda, his master, presented this stone to Shah Jehan to whose side he attached himself, it was then in the rough and weighed 900 ratties which are equivalent to $787\frac{1}{2}$ carats and it had several flames.

“If this stone had been in Europe, it would have been treated in a different manner, for some good pieces would have been taken from it, and it would have weighed more than it does instead of which it has been all ground down. It was the Sicer Hortensio Borgio, a Venetian, who cut it, for which he was badly reprimanded for when it was cut, he was reproached with

having spoilt the stone. which ought to have retained greater weight and instead of paying him for his work, the Emperor fined him Rs. 10,000 and would have taken more if he had possessed it. If this Sicer Hortensio had understood his trade he would have been able to take a large piece from this stone, without doing injury to the Emperor's jewel and without having had so much trouble in grinding it, but he was not a very accomplished diamond-cutter."

There is, however, a considerable difference between the history and accounts of this diamond given by European writers of this period. They give different descriptions and varied weights. There is also a great diversity as regards many an important fact. The story given above as to the cutting of the diamond is simply unbelievable. Tavernier, Bernier and Maurice all refer to different men who cut the diamond. Strangely enough, we find no support for this story in the contemporary Indian chroniclers of that period who have given authenticated and accurate accounts of that period, some of which are also directly connected with the historic diamonds. If the stone had been spoiled by a European cutter, as described above, it would have surely found a mention in the history of Shah Jehan's reign.

There is another reason why this story ought not to be taken as historically correct. It has been admitted by French Bran in his accounts that Indians were much more skilful

cutters of diamonds than Europeans who were paid smaller remunerations for their jobs due to their lesser knowledge of the art. In particular he says that Hortensio was bad at his trade and a crude cutter of diamonds. How could then the Emperor have entrusted the difficult task to a foreigner in preference to an Indian cutter with superior knowledge and specially to one who was so unskilled that he ground down the great diamond from $787\frac{1}{2}$ carats to 280 carats without thinking of cleaving a few pieces from it. This story of cutting the diamond, therefore, does not stand to reason and appears to be incorrect. In fact the whole history about this historical diamond given by these European writers is not very dependable. The reason seems to be that being ignorant of the Indian language they had to depend on others for their information. They accepted all that came to their knowledge as correct without having the means to separate grain from husk. Tavernier has also given a drawing of the diamond. It does not seem to be an exact one and differs widely from the descriptions of the diamond given in different places and also from the diamond when it was presented to Queen Victoria, before it was cut. It appears that this drawing was made by him from memory, long after he had actually seen it while in India. Along with this drawing Tavernier gives the following description of the diamond :

“This diamond belongs to the great Moghul, who did me the honour to have it shown to me

with all his other jewels. You see presented here in its form after having been cut and I was allowed to weigh it, I ascertained that it weighed $319\frac{1}{2}$ ratties which are equivalent to $279.9/16$ of our carats. When in the rough it weighed, as I have elsewhere said, 907 ratties or $793.5/8$ carats. This stone is of the same form as if one cut an egg through the middle."

This operation may be performed in two ways either transversely or longitudively. From the figure given by Tavernier, it appears that it was cut transversely. When it was presented to Queen Victoria it was of the shape of a half egg, cut longitudively. This appears to be another flaw in the description given by him. He assigns to it a value of 11,723,228 livres, 14 sols and 3 liars (£879245—18s.— $1\frac{1}{2}$ d the livre being equal to 1.6 d and the sol to 9 d.) He has given the method by which the value of the diamonds was ascertained. It being interesting, is re-produced below in translation :

"It is first necessary to ascertain the weight of the diamond and next to see if it is perfect, whether it is a thick stone, square shaped and having all its angles perfect, whether it is a beautiful white water and bright, without points and without flaws. If it is a stone cut into facets, which is ordinarily called a rose, it is necessary to observe whether the form is truly round or oval, whether the stone is well-spread and whether it is not a lumpy stone and moreover, whether it is of uniform water and is

without points and flaws as I described the thick stone.

“A stone of this quality weighing one carat is worth 180 livres (£11. 5s.) or more and supposing it is required to know the value of a stone of 12 carats of the same degree of perfection, this is how it is to be ascertained.

Square the 12, this amounts to 144, next multiply 144 by 150 i. e. the price of one carat and it amounts to $12 \times 12 \times 150 = 21,600$ livres.¹ This is the price of the 12 carats.

“But it is not enough to know the price of only perfect diamonds, one must know also the price of those which are not so, this is ascertained by the same rule, and on the basis of this price of a stone of 1 carat. This is an example. Suppose a diamond of 15 carats is not perfect, the water being not good or the stone badly shaped, or full of spots and flaws. A diamond of the same nature of the weight of 1 carat, would not be worth more than 60 or 80 or 100 livres at the most, according to the beauty of the diamond. You must then square the weight of the diamond, i. e. 15

1. i. e. £. 1,620. Whatever may have been the case, it is now apparent that no hard and fast rule can be given to determine the selling value of diamonds, as it is subject to very great variations. Among other formula, however, the following may be mentioned :—

$M/2(M \times 2)$ a where m = the number of carats and the value of 1. This is given in Handbuck Der Edelstein, A. Schranf Vienna A Stone of 12 carats, similar in quality to that above given so calculated, would be worth £. 945.

carats and next multiply the product 125 by the value of the stone of 1 carat, which may for example be 80 livres and the product which is 10,000 livres *¹ is the price of the diamond of 15 carats.

“It is easy to see from this the great difference in value between a perfect stone and one which is not so. For if this stone of 15 carats had been perfect, the second multiplication would be by 150, which is the price of a perfect of 1 carat and then it would amount not to 10,000 (18,000) livres but to 33,750 livres i.e. 23,750 (15, 750) livres, more than an imperfect diamond of the same weight.

“According to this rule, the following is the value of the two largest among the cut stones in the world, one of them in Asia belonging to the Great Moghul, the other in Europe belonging to the Grand Duke of Tuscony—as will be seen by the subjoined figures.²

“The Grand Moghuls’ diamond weighs 279. 9/16 carats, is of perfect water, good form, and has only a small flaw which is in the edge of

1. i. e. £. 750. But this calculation though represented graphically as a sum in figures, in the original, is wholly incorrect as $15 \times 15 = 225$ not 125 and the product of this multiple by 80 is 18,000 instead of 10,000 livres, the value of the diamond consequently would be £. 1,350.

2. Its description is given by the author thus :-No.2 represents the form of the Grand Duke of Tuscany’s diamond, which he had had the goodness to show me upon more than one occasion. It weighs $139\frac{1}{2}$ carats, but it is

the basal circumference of the stone. Except for this flaw the first carat would be placed at 160 livres, but on that account I do not estimate it at more than 150 and so calculated according to the above given rule it reaches a sum of 11,676,150 livres only and thus these 9/16 livres are worth 47,128 livres 14 gols 3 liards.

“The Grand Duke of Tuscany’s diamond weighs $139\frac{1}{2}$ carats, is clear and of good form, cut on all sides into facets and as the water tends somewhat to a citron colour, I estimate the first carat at only 135 livres, from which the value of the diamond ought to be 2,608,335 livres (the equivalent of this is £.195,625-2s.-6d.)”¹

unfortunate that its water tends towards the colour of citron. And in the footnote of this statement the translator says, “for identification of this stone with the Austrian Yellow, once the property of the Emperor of Austria and known as the Florentine (see index). It weighs as recently determined by Schranf 133. $1/5$ Viene carats or 27, 454 Grams. His figure of it corresponds with that given by our author. The figures of the Austrian Yellow given by Murray and following him by Emanuel, erroneously represent a distinct stone. (Bernier’s Travels)

This description, as also the figure of the stone, corresponds in all important respects with the “Austrian Yellow” once in the possession of the Emperor of Austria. Its weight is $133.2/5$ Vienna carats according to Schranf which would amount to about 134 French carats, the proportion in milligrams being 206.13 : 205.5 and not $139\frac{1}{2}$ as stated by Streeter. The value of the stone has been variously estimated at £.40,000, £.50,000 and even £.1,55,682.

1. This is the account of this “Gem of the purest ray serene” given by Tavernier, as he saw it in the Treasury of Aurangzeb.

CHAPTER VII

Nadir Shah grabs Koh-i Noor

Aurangzeb was a bigoted ruler. He bade good-bye to the policy of religious toleration followed so advantageously by Akbar the Great. The Rajput warriors of Central India and other powerful Hindu chieftains who had been drawn round the Moghul Throne, attracted by the refreshingly liberal outlook of that illustrious monarch, were seething with discontent under the iron heels of Aurangzeb. His intolerance and fanatical outlook were so pronounced that he took the extreme step of levying *Jazia* on his Hindu subjects. It was a tax inflicted on them for following a religion other than the one followed by the Monarch. He had already alienated the loyalty of the Hindus by openly defiling their places of worship and constructing mosques over the ruins of their temples. The levying of 'Jazia' proved the last straw on the camel's back and there was open revolt in Southern India, led by that skilful hilly warrior, Shivaji, who by his dramatic and telling blows inflicted on the great Moghul Empire, started a movement of Hindu Renaissance which gathered momentum and ultimately assumed the form of a tiny Marhatta Empire, which sprang up around Poona and Sitara.

Aurangzeb tried his best to nip the evil in

the bud and sent his choicest armies under tried and trusted generals to crush this 'Mountain Rat,' as he contemptuously called Shivaji ; but the latter's masterly strategy, surprising courage and swiftness of action broke all the Imperial designs. Shivaji was, in fact, a symbol of the general discontent which prevailed and the standard of revolt which he raised, soon spread with such amazing rapidity that even before the death of Aurangzeb, the disintegration of the mighty Moghul Empire had distinctly set in.

He was followed on the Imperial Throne by a set of weak and unworthy successors who made no attempt to regain the lost ground. Steeped in debauchery, they cared not a jot for the glorious Empire which Babar had so heroically founded, Humayun so bravely defended and Akbar so wisely consolidated. It was now breaking to pieces before their eyes. Internal intrigues, family jealousies and disloyalties of Court nobles, all combined to close a glorious chapter in the history of India. At the time, of which we are now talking, the occupant of the Delhi Throne was Mohammed Shah *Rangila*, called so on account of his gay manners. He loved ease, pleasure and joys of life. Little did he care for the dangers from within and without. He had no time for them.

At that time one Nadir Kuli, a shepherd of Persia, gathered strength and by virtue of his qualities as a leader and fighter attracted a

large number of robbers and free-booters by his side which he later organised into a powerful army. He had no difficulty in snatching the throne of Persia from the weak hands of the Safwid king and proclaiming himself as King of Persia in his place. Consolidating his power as such, he entered the borders of Afghanistan and conquered Ghazni and Kandhar. Some defeated Afghan nobles crossed into India and sought the help of Mohammed Shah. They warned him against the greed of the 'Shepherd King' and cautioned him against the covetous glances which he was casting at India, the fame of whose jewels and riches had travelled far and wide. The gay king did not pay any heed to the Afghan nobles. "Is he in Kandhar ?" said the pleasure-loving king, "then there is nothing to worry. Kandhar is far off." And he plunged into his own pursuits of pleasure.

Nadir was losing no time. He had entered the borders of Hindusthan. Peshawar fell to him like a ripe fruit. Then came the turn of Lahore. When the news of the capture of Lahore was conveyed to King Mohammed Shah, he again hic-coughed "Lahore ! So Nadir Shah has reached Lahore. Nothing to worry about ; Lahore is as yet far off." And so no serious preparations were made by any body to check-mate the rising tide of the Persian hordes. With lightning speed they advanced and reached near Delhi in January 1739. In the plains of Karnal, about 50 miles from the Imperial capital, a nominal battle was given to

the invader by the Moghul armies under Nazam-ul-Mulk and Saadit Khan, in which the latter were badly routed. Mohammed Shah had no means of organising defence and finding resistance impossible he made an offer of capitulation, which was readily accepted by the invaders. Nadir Shah entered Delhi with great pomp and was conveyed to the Imperial Palaces. He was struck by the grandeur of the Moghul Court and looked at every article in the Palace with curiosity, which he made no attempts to conceal. He was much pleased with Mohammed Shah Rangila who fed and feasted the conquerors on a lavish scale and Nadir Shah expressed his intention of leaving the Moghul Empire to Mohammed Shah.

The Moghul king thought that he had escaped lightly but that was not to be. A few days later, some Persian soldiers were killed in a skirmish with the Moghul army men. Nadir Shah came out of the Palace to enquire into the incident when a few stones were pelted at him. This aroused the worst ire of the Persian king and he unsheathed his sword as a token of his orders for a general slaughter. No sooner did the Persian soldiers get the orders of their angry king, then they began to indulge in killing and looting indiscriminately. Every where there was fire and blood. Innocent men, women and children were slaughtered in thousands and literally did the gutters of Delhi flow with blood. Houses were broken into,

looted and burnt. This went on for full nine hours and about one hundred and fifty thousand people lost their lives. God knows for how long would this carnage have lasted, but the humble appeals of King Mohammad Shah, (who with tears trickling down his cheeks, and on bended knees pleaded on behalf of his innocent and helpless subjects) pacified the wrath of the mighty monarch. Granting the humble prayers of the vanquished Moghul Emperor, Nadir Shah put back his sword in his sheath and soon the general slaughter ceased¹.

To please his conqueror, Mohammad Shah presented him all the jewels of the royal treasury, gold, riches and countless objects of great value. In addition to all this, the famous Peacock Throne, the pride of the Moghul Emperors, was given to him. It is stated by an authority that King Nadir Shah got from King

1. Some writers believe that Nadir Shah withdrew his orders of general slaughter in Delhi on the entreaties of a beautiful and brave Rajput girl named Sitara, whom Nadir loved passionately. Sitara was one of the fifty young and charming girls presented to Nadir Shah at Karnal after his victory over the Moghul armies in 1793. Nadir fell in love with her at the first sight and married her in the camp after a brief ceremony. See "Famous Love Affairs of the World" by Masud-ul-Hassan, page 39.

Mohammad Shah *Rangila* the following articles :

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Gold and Silver Plates and
Cash worth : | Rs. 30 Crores. |
| 2. Jewels worth : | 25 Crores. |
| 3. The famous Peacock
Throne along with nine
other Thrones and wea-
pons and utensils, all gar-
nished with precious stones : | 9 Crores. |
| 4. Rich Manufactures : | 2 Crores. |
| 5. Canons, Stones and Furniture : | 4 Crores. |

Total : Rs. 70 Crores.

Besides this Nadir was presented with 300 elephants, 10,000 horses and 10,000 camels. And above every thing else he got the historical diamond, the pride of India. How it fell into his hands is not very clear as there are different versions about it. Bosworth relates a rather interesting story about it. He says that Mohammad Shah gave all he had to his conqueror except that diamond. All the treasures were emptied, but the diamond was not there. Mohammad Shah used to carry it with him in his turban. The secret was known only to a selected few including an eunuch in the Harem of the Emperor. To win the favour of Nadir Shah, the disloyal eunuch betrayed Mohammad Shah and whispered the secret to the former. Nadir Shah who was an extremely clever man hit out a plan to deprive the unfortunate monarch of his last valuable possession.

He declared that being very much pleased with the hospitality and generosity of the fallen king, he had decided to give back his empire to him as a token of his pleasure. To celebrate this event he ordered public rejoicings. A Durbar was held where this announcement was made after which the two Kings retired. When they were alone Nadir affectionately embraced Mohammad Shah and said that they had become brothers as a token of which he desired to exchange *turbans*.¹ with him. There was little pause between word and action. Nadir took the turban off Mohammad Shah and placed it on his head and gave his own in return to the amazed monarch. The latter was taken aback at what had happened; but he was helpless. He showed no signs of emotion or excitement. His composed behaviour made Nadir Shah doubtful and he thought that the bloody eunuch had played a hoax with him. To be sure, he hastened to his private apartment and searched the turban for the coveted diamond and lo! it was before him in all its brilliance. Nadir was so much struck with amazement at its brightness that he exclaimed: in wonder "KOH-I-NOOR" which means 'Mountain of Light'. Henceforth this historic diamond came to be known by this name.

Other historians, headed by Syed Abdul Latif, do not agree with this story and regard

1. It is a well-known oriental custom. The exchange of turbans is regarded as a solemn ceremony indicating the creation of ties of brotherhood and sincere friendship.

it as baseless. According to them, the diamond was presented to King Nadir Shah by Mohammad Shah Rangila as a token of his gratitude to him for having restored his empire to him. But all the authorities agree that when Nadir Shah beheld its brilliance, he exclaimed : "KOH-I-NOOR". After remaining in Delhi for 59 days, the conqueror departed for Persia and for the second time in history Koh-i-Noor went out of India to pursue its chequered career. How true were the words of Humayun, that "such precious gems cannot be obtained by purchases; either they fall to one by the arbitrament of the flashing sword, which is an expression of the Divine Will, or else they come through the grace of mighty monarchs". Shah Tahmasp got it through the grace of a monarch (Humayun); but Nadir Shah got it through his flashing sword from Mohd. Shah.

CHAPTER VIII

Koh-i-Noor Brings Misery to Nadir Shah's Dynasty

Nadir Shah did not live long to enjoy the fruits of his fabulous loot from India. He was cruel, heartless and ruled with an iron hand. This was too much for his nobility who could not bear all this. They revolted in large numbers. Nadir Shah quelled these uprisings and while busy doing so he was assassinated by his nephew Ali Kuli Khan, who proclaimed himself as King under the title of Ali Shah. It was in the year 1747 A. D. He was, however, a weak man and remained unsuccessful in knitting together the revolting nobility. The Kajurs became masters of the northern provinces while the southern parts fell into the hands of the Zands. Ahmad Shah Abdali, a distinguished general of Nadir Shah, turned his attention towards Afghanistan and captured Herat and Kandhar. From there he marched on Kabul which easily fell into his hands without much resistance. Ahmad Shah proclaimed himself King of Afghanistan.

But where was the Koh-i-Noor ? In whose hands it fell ? Again, we have different versions about it. According to Messrs. Thompson and Kipling¹ it fell into the hands of one

1. History of Lahore : By Syed Mohd. Latif.
(Page 72-73)

Karim Khan, a General of the Zand tribe. After his death it passed on to his brother's successors, Jafar Khan and Kutub Ali Khan. Mellison and Sykes, however, do not agree with this version. They maintain that it was Ahmad Shah who came into the possession of this diamond. They aver that at the time of the death of Nadir Shah, a convoy was travelling to Tehran with very valuable booty that had fallen to Nadir Shah in India. Ahmad Shah intercepted this convoy and took possession of all the jewels, gold and other valuables. This convoy included the coveted Koh-i-Noor which thus fell into the hands of Ahmad Shah Abdali.

Syed Mohammad Latif does not agree with both these versions. He is of the opinion that after assassinating Nadir Shah, Ali Kuli Khan became its proud possessor. It is very difficult to say which one of the above stories is more credible than the others.

Ali Shah, as we have stated above, was a weak monarch. After a short span of an inglorious reign, he was overpowered by his own cousin Ibrahim, who not only captured his throne, but put out his eyes in a most cruel manner. Before long Ibrahim also met the same fate and was butchered by his own men. He was succeeded by Adil Shah, whose first act asking was that he put to death all possible claimants to the throne. So all those connected with the late king were killed with the exception of a small boy named Shah Rukh Mirza. He was the grandson of Nadir Shah. The late

king's eldest son was married to Fatima, daughter of Shah Hussain and thus the only one who was saved from the cruel hands of Adil Shah was at the same time the only rightful claimant to the throne of the Persian conqueror. Adil Shah gave out that this boy was amongst those killed; so that in the absence of any rightful claimant to the throne, other nobles might accept him as their king, without any demur. The chief reason which weighed with him in sparing the life of this chap was that if the worse happened and the people insisted on having some one from the family of Nadir Shah as king, he would put forward this little boy and make him a nominal king under his own guardianship. By this means he wanted to keep the real power in his own hands. But man proposes and God disposes. The usurper did not live long to see his designs completed. He too was murdered and Shah Rukh Mirza was proclaimed as the boy King. He came into possession of the Imperial treasury which included the Koh-i-Noor. He was very fond of jewels which fell to him and lest some one mightier than himself grab them, he concealed them somewhere in a hidden place which was known only to him.

In the year 1749, Ahmad Shah Abdali, who had established himself in Afghanistan, turned his eyes on the Persian territories of his late master. He was well aware of the weak condition of the Persian king who had no hold on his men and armies. He advanced towards

Meshad and Herat and had no difficulty in overthrowing the forces of Shah Rukh Mirza. He also annexed the adjoining territories. Herat was added to his own empire while Siestan was constituted into another province under the rule of Shah Rukh who agreed to acknowledge the overlordship of the Afghan ruler. It is said that as a token of gratitude for the favour shown to him by his conqueror, he presented Koh-i-Noor to Ahmad Shah Abdali.

He remained in possession of a number of valuable jewels which, as we have said before, he had hidden somewhere. His great love for them paid him dear in his after life when the founder of the Khagir dynasty, Agha Mohammad Khan, hearing of the valuable possessions of this unfortunate prince decided to deprive him of all of them. He marched on Meshad in 1796 in rather a quaint manner. It appears that in those times treachery of any sort or description was a valid weapon for gaining their ends by adventurers and conquerors. All these cases were those of the end justifying the means and it is rather a very sad commentary on the standard of morality of those times and of those people who put all finer feelings and higher ideals to the winds in order to satisfy their own greed and lust of power and pelf.

Agha Mohammad Khan gave out that he was proceeding on a pilgrimage to holy Meshad with a view to pay his homage to the shrine of Hazrat Amam Raza. Shah Rukh Mirza was blind at that time and the administration

of the state was being carried on by his son Nadir Mirza as Regent. Agha Mohammad, as soon as he reached Meshad, appeared in his true colours and surrounded the city as a full-fledged invader. Nadir Mirza who was not prepared for all this, fled like a coward towards Afghanistan, leaving his blind father to be persecuted by the invader for the sake of his concealed jewels. Terrible were the cruelties which were perpetrated on the unfortunate king's head by the conqueror. A description given by Sir John Malcolm is given below to give an idea to the reader as to the length to which greed and avarice can go in making beasts of men :

“Avarice was almost as strong in Agha Mohammad as the love for power, as he appeared even more desirous of possessing jewels than treasures. On the death of Lutaf Ali Khan he had obtained some of the richest booty brought from India by Nadir Shah and since he arrived in Kharassan, he had recovered several of inferior valuables from the chiefs who had shared in the spoils of Nadir's successors and who now surrendered their dangerous wealth, for Agha Mohammad treated as the guiltiest of criminals all such as retained what he deemed the property of the sovereign. Shah Rukh, who had long ceased to exercise power, was yet blind to possess many precious stones of great value, which he had concealed even from his sons; he denied his possessing them with most solemn oaths, but in vain. Torture in all its forms

was applied and we almost cease to pity this degraded prince when we find that his discoveries kept pace with the pains inflicted. Treasures and jewels were produced which had been sunk in wells and hidden in walls, and at last when a circle of paste was put upon his head and boiling oil was poured into it, he discerned a ruby of extraordinary size and lustre which had once decorated the crown of Aurangzeb and was the chief object of Agha Mohammad's desire. That monarch, the moment he heard this jewel was found, expressed the greatest joy; he directed the torments to cease and accused Shah Rukh, not altogether without justice, of being the author of the great miseries he had suffered.

“After being deprived of all his diamonds and jewels, the unfortunate Shah Rukh died of the after-effects of the untold persecutions to which he had been subjected by Agha Mohammad.”

CHAPTER IX

Koh-i-Noor makes History in Afghanistan

Events were moving fast in Afghanistan. In 1773, the strong man of the Afghans died, leaving behind weak descendants and a crashing kingdom. His son Tammur Shah was a weakling and an unworthy successor to the great fighter. He clung to his treasury and Koh-i-Noor with great tenacity and held to them fast till his death in May 1793. To add to the miseries of an already crumbling kingdom he left behind him twenty-three sons to contest the throne of Kabul.¹ *Zenana* of the late king, as is generally the case with weaklings, had grown very formidable. Through its influence and backed by Payandah Khan, the powerful Barkzai's chief, the fifth son of Tammur, ascended the throne of Kabul. He was, however, a weak man like his father and did not inspire any confidence in his followers. He was constantly harassed by his brother and especially by Mahmood Mirza, better known as Mahmood Shah. He was a dashing prince and soon gathered a large number of followers. Afraid of the growing power of his brother, Zaman Shah, he left with a small following from Kabul to Jalalabad with a view to gain the help of Afghan chiefs. He was partially

1. History of Afghanistan : by A. B. Mellison, Page 291—292.

successful by means of tall promises of power and honour which he held out to them. Prominent amongst those who promised help was Ahmad Khan, the chief of the Nurzai clan. Mahmood was in the meantime advancing fast and his armies met those of Zaman Shah at Sar-i-orp. The plans of the latter crashed down like a pack of cards, because Ahmad Khan on whose support he had built all his hopes deserted him and went over to Mahmood with all his forces.

Zaman Shah, baffled and beaten, fled towards fort Ashiq to take refuge with its Governor Ashiq Hussain, whom he counted as a friend. He was accompanied by his Wazir and three of his most trusted lieutenants. They were treated with all honour and the hospitality shown to them was marvellous. Zaman hoped to try his luck once more with the help of Ashiq Hussain and the latter was even inclined to give him some sort of aid, but destiny was weaving another pattern for the fugitive king. Mahmood, in the meantime, had captured Kabul and established his sway over the surrounding territory. As soon as Ashiq heard of it he thought discretion to be the better part of valour. He did not think it worthwhile to run any risk of espousing a lost cause. At once he changed his plans and instead of hitting out some plan to help Zaman Shah, he decided to hand him over to his brother Mahmood. Zaman was imprisoned in a cell and quick

messengers were despatched to inform Mahmood of this grand achievement of his.

Zaman Shah had no hopes left now. He hid the Koh-i-Noor (which he was always carrying with him) in a crevice in one of the walls of the cell and his other jewels in a hole dug inside it with his dagger.¹ Mahmood, as soon as he heard of his brother's confinement at the hands of Ashiq Hussain, called him to Kabul. In the way he was met by Asad Khan Barakzee, brother of Fateh Khan. A surgeon was accompanying the Sirdar. As soon as the unfortunate prisoner saw them, he guessed the cruel designs of his victorious brother. The poor man was blinded without any loss of time and conveyed to the Fort Bala Hissar as a prisoner.

But his miseries did not end there. Having secured him as a prisoner the next step of Mahmood was to force his brother to deliver all his jewels and valuables to him. So his tortures began. Zaman Shah, however, remained firm and told Mahmood that while crossing the river on his way he had thrown all his jewels including the Koh-i-Noor in it. Mahmood had no time to pursue this matter any further as his brother Shuja Mirza won over the nobility to his side by distributing large sums of money and making handsome promises of rewards. He proclaimed himself King and marched towards Kabul with a strong force. For a long time the

1. Rambles and Recollections by Sleeman. Vol. 1, Page 475.

wavering fortune toyed with the two brothers, now favouring one and then smiling on the other. Small skirmishes were followed by a pitched battle in July 1803, wherein Mahmood's armies suffered a defeat and left the field helter-skelter. Shuja Mirza entered Kabul victoriously and proclaimed himself King as Shah Shuja. His first act as King was to hasten to Fort Bala Hissar where Mahmood had hid himself, to lance his eyes, just as the latter had done in the case of Zaman Shah. Mahmood was, however, saved from this just retribution, through the intervention of Sher Mohammad, one of the chief supporters of Shah Shuja.¹

His next step was to release the blinded Zaman Shah from his prison cell and to put in his place the vanquished Mahmood. Zaman Shah expressed his gratitude to his brother by presenting him with all his jewels in which was included the historical Koh-i-Noor. He in return avenged the treachery of Ashiq Hussain, by blowing him, his wife and children from the mouth of a cannon.

Even the lightning speed with which Shah Shuja captured the throne of Kabul failed to instill feelings of reverence and awe in the minds of the turbulent Afghan chiefs, who continued to back their respective claimants for the Kabul Throne. The most conspicuous of this band was one Fateh Khan, one of the generals of Mahmood, now a prisoner in the Fort of Bala

1. History of Afghanistan by Mellison, Page 313.

Hissar. Fateh Khan had valiantly fought for his master and gave a tough battle to the forces of Shah Shuja, but his own men deserted him and he had to flee. He, however, did not give up hope and continued trying to rescue Mahmood from his confinement and place him on the Kabul throne once more.

He thought out a plan to release his master from the clutches of Shuja. He conspired with some of the sentinels guarding Bala Hissar and managed to supply Mahmood with necessary implements to work out his escape. He also sent him word that he should keep everything strictly secret and to trust no one except the Khizilbash who still espoused his cause. Mahmood acted upon this advice and was successful in making good his escape along with Dost Mohammad. He fled to Girishle and plundered three caravans in the way.

Shah Shuja in the meantime had been planning an attack on Sind. By the time of Mahmood's escape these plans had been completed. Sher Mohammad, the Chief Minister of Shuja, advised him to change his plans and try to capture his brother once more, but Shuja was inclined not to attach much importance to Mahmood's escape and insisted on attacking Sind. Shuja did not listen to the wise counsel of his Wazir and even treated him slightly. This touched him to the quick and he revolted proclaiming the nephew of Shah Shuja as king under the title of Kaisar Shah. Shah Shuja was caught in a tight corner. He gathered

the forces which he was intending to use on Sind and met Sher Mohammad in a deadly battle. Sher Mohammad's armies were routed and he was himself killed in action; but this victory cost the foolish king very dear.

Mahmood in the meantime took his opportunity and with the help of the Barakzais marched on Kandhar which easily fell to him. Calamities, they say, never come alone. At that very moment news reached him that his trusted general Akram Khan, whom he had sent to Kashmir to subdue Ata Mohammad Khan, the son of his vanquished Wazir Sher Mohammad, had been badly defeated. This was a telling blow as the army which had been sent under Akram Khan was the main force of Shah Shuja.

Shah Shuja was at that time negotiating with the British Mission sent by the Governor-General of India under Elphinstone, to negotiate with him a treaty of friendship. He was at his wits' end to know what to do. He had no alternative but to wait for the return of Akram Khan. Shah Shuja used every endeavour to raise troops. By degrees the remnants of the Kashmir army and their leader returned and by the middle of June 1809, the Shah set out for Kabul. But Mahmood Shah and Fateh Khan had been there before hand. They had marched on Kabul and from there started towards Peshawar. They met Shah Shuja's army advantageously posted near Gandmak. Mahmood attacked it in front, whilst Fateh

Khan took it in the flank. The result was never in doubt. Akram Khan was killed. Shah Shuja fled into the mountains leaving all the jewels (except the Koh-i-Noor) and his luggage in the hands of his rival.¹

For full nine years, Shah Shuja was making strenuous attempts to regain the Throne. He made a number of attacks, but without success. At last in 1810 he was badly defeated at Kandhar. He made yet another feverish attempt, but was again overpowered in 1811 at Akora. He was made a prisoner by the Governor of Attock, who handed him over to his enemy, Ata Mohd. Khan, the Governor of Kashmir.

Before being captured and defeated, he had succeeded in sending his family to the Punjab, where after experiencing great difficulties and suffering untold miseries they reached safely and placed themselves in the hands of Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Lahore.

1. History of Afghanistan : by Mellison, Page 333. Subsequent events show that Shah Shuja was able to take all his jewels with him besides the Koh-i-Noor.

CHAPTER X

Back to India once again

Shah Shuja had hoped that with the return of fortune he would bring back his riches and family from the Punjab, whose capital he intended to use as a temporary asylum. Events, however, took quite another turn and he was not only defeated but also fell into the hands of his worst enemy. Ata Mohammad, as we know, was the son of his earstwhile Lieutenant Sher Khan who had helped him to gain the Kabul Throne and who was subsequently killed by him in battle. When Wafa Begum, his wife, heard of the misfortune which had befallen her husband, she was prostrate with grief. The event is described by the Court Vakil of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, named Sohan Lal, in the following words :

“On hearing this dreadful news, Wafa Begum, struck with thousands upon thousands of troubles and distresses; felt very sorrowful and morose and became the target of different kinds of arrows of torment and the victim of arrows of affliction. She displayed a policy of sagacity for the emancipation of the peerless one and sent reliable Vakils to the King stating that as ordained by the Almighty God, Shah Shuja-ul-Mulk had become a prisoner in the clutches of Fate. If by his benevolent and intense efforts he were able to effect the Shah's

release and the Shah was brought to Lahore and openly welcomed in the city, a priceless diamond would be presented to him in return for his services. Accordingly, Ranjit Singh undertook to obtain the Shah's release."

This request from the Queen suited Ranjit Singh and it wholly fitted into his scheme of conquering Kashmir, the beautiful valley and health resort of India. He had long been entertaining designs to add it to his own kingdom. The only difficulty in his way was that while his Sikh soldiers were unconquerable in the plains and had acquired a great name and fame as fighters and warriors, they were not acquainted with the technique of fighting in the hills. He wanted the guidance and help of some one conversant with hilly warfare. The opportunity to have it was now fast arriving and events were taking a shape which was most favourable to him. Mahmood had by this time established his sway in Afghanistan. The real force behind the throne, however, was Fateh Khan through whose strategy and help he had secured not only his release but the throne of Kabul. The latter was in fact the real ruler and Mahmood was only a puppet in his hands. He was convinced that as long as Ata Mohammad Khan was in possession of Kashmir, neither he nor his master Mahmood were safe or secure. He, therefore, decided to crush him and throw him out of their way. He was conscious of his power and fully aware that he could not accomplish this task alone. He,

therefore, thought of Ranjit Singh and sought his help in this enterprise. Negotiations were opened and Fateh Khan offered to pay to the Sikh Ruler a subsidy of Rs. 9,00,000 a year, in return for his help.

In this offer, Ranjit Singh saw his opportunity. He wanted to kill two birds with one stone, the release of Shah Shuja and the capture of Kashmir. He at once accepted the offer of Fateh Khan and agreed to help him with an army of 10,000 Sikhs. Kashmir was, therefore, attacked from two sides and the Afghan and Sikh armies converged Srinagar. Ata Mohammad Khan realised the position and found that it would be useless to offer any pitched battles to the combined armies. He shut himself in the fort of Srinagar from where he offered resistance to the Afghan armies besieging the city of Srinagar. For thirteen days the siege lasted and Ata Mohammad, finding it difficult and useless to continue resistance, surrendered to Fateh Khan.

He thus had an almost easy victory. The Sikh army had not reached Srinagar by this time and this gave to Fateh Khan an excuse to withhold the subsidy promised to Ranjit Singh. He placed his brother Mohammad Azam Khan in charge of the Province and went back to Kabul, leaving instructions that Maharaja Ranjit Singh was not to be paid a single penny. The news got wind and the Sikh Ruler waylaid the returning Afghan army, inflicting severe losses and plundering it.

Another result of the defeat of Ata Mohammad Khan was that Shah Shuja got his freedom. He could now either return to Kabul or join his family at Lahore. Fateh Khan advised him to adopt the former course and dwelt on the dangers of his falling into the hands of Ranjit Singh. He argued that by doing so he would run the risk of losing not only his dearly bought freedom, but also his valuable possessions including the much-coveted Koh-i-Noor. But Shah Shuja could not trust his brother Mahmood, whom he had tried to blind after depriving him of his Throne. He, therefore, decided to try his luck with Ranjit Singh and quickly walked into his parlour. Even when Ranjit Singh was busy in his Kashmir expedition, he at once thought of squeezing out the jewels and especially the well-known Koh-i-Noor from Wafa Begum. His trusted lieutenants, Dewan Devi Dass, Faqir Aziz-ud-din, Raza Ansari, Dewan Bhawani Dass, Munshi Karam Chand, along with Lala Ram Nand, a goldsmith of Amritsar, were sent to the unfortunate Queen to demand the Koh-i-Noor, which she had promised to hand over to Ranjit Singh. In vain did the Begum plead that she had promised to deliver the Koh-i-Noor in case Ranjit Singh secured the release of her husband. The deputation pleaded, however, that the armies of Ranjit Singh had gone to Kashmir with the express purpose of securing his release and they had definite orders not to return without achieving this purpose. He averred that Shah Shuja would, therefore,

be in Lahore within a very short time. The arguments went on for a long time. Eventually, Mir Abul Hasan Khan, Mala Jafar and Qazi Sher Mohammad pleaded for the unfortunate Queen and stood sureties for her, promising solemnly on her behalf that the diamond would be handed over to Ranjit Singh on the very day when Shah Shuja arrived in Lahore.

The Shah's arrival was not delayed. We have described above that he was released from Kashmir as soon as Fateh Khan defeated Ata Mohammad Khan. In March 1813 he reached Lahore and was received on behalf of the Maharaja by his son Kharak Singh and Bhayya Ram Singh, with great honour and distinction. On a horse decorated with gold and silver strappings, he was escorted to the city with great pomp and ceremony. But as soon as he reached within the city walls, he was made a prisoner and confined along with his family in the house of Dewan Lakhat Rai, near the Shah-almi Gate, known then as the Putree Darwaza.

Securing him, the Punjab Ruler lost no time in demanding the promised Koh-i-Noor which he was anxious to secure without the least delay. With this object he sent Bhayya Ram Singh, Faqir Aziz-ud-Din and Dewan Moti Ram to demand it from the prisoner king. Their plea was that his release was due to the attack of Sikh army on Kashmir. Shah Shuja was taken aback at the time and the manner of this unexpected demand. He tried his best to evade them and

but several conflicting excuses. Sometimes, he said that he had lost it along with his other jewels and sometimes he gave out that he had mortgaged it for Rs. six crores at Kandhar. The deputation was not inclined, however, to listen to these excuses. The greater the excuses put forward by Shah Shuja, the more insistant became the demands of the royal messengers. All tacts were used, promises, persuasions, arguments and threats. Bhayya Ram Singh even offered an insult to the king which he greatly resented. At last, to save himself from the indignities which were offered to him, he produced a large topaz (Pukhraj) of yellow colour and gave it to the messengers of the Maharaja for being handed over to him, saying that it was the famous Koh-i-Noor. When this was shown to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, he at once sent for the jewellers to ascertain whether this was the Koh-i-Noor or not, and on being told by them that it was not the Koh-i-Noor, he kept the *topaz*; but sent immediate orders to place the Shah under restraint and to prevent him from eating or drinking until the Koh-i-Noor demanded was given up, as the King had attempted to deceive the Maharaja by sending a *topaz* instead.

For full two days the unfortunate King and his family had to go without food or any other kind of nourishment resulting in absolute deprivative. But they were made of a sterner stuff. Even this coercion failed to have the desired effect and the Koh-i-Noor was not

forthcoming. Finding it of no avail, Ranjit Singh ordered that food and nourishment be restored to the King and his family. It was done. The guard at the Haveli was strengthened and no one was allowed to go in or come out except with the permission of the Maharaja. Ranjit Singh was very much angry with Shah Shuja for his withholding the Koh-i-Noor from him and to which, he thought, he was fully entitled in view of the solemn promise made by Wafa Begum, which was subsequently confirmed by her when the deputation waited upon her. He, however, controlled his anger and thought out of some other plan to have the coveted diamond which was fast making history.

CHAPTER XI

Ranjit Singh gets it at last

Ranjit Singh was determined to get the Koh-i-Noor. Having failed to achieve his purpose through harsh methods, he changed his strategy. Orders to withhold food and water were withdrawn, the guard at the Haveli, where Shah Shuja alongwith his family was detained, was strengthened and secret agents of the Maharaja were set about to induce the Shah to part with this precious diamond on any terms he liked. Upto that time Ranjit Singh could not be sure whether the Koh-i-Noor was actually with the unfortunate fugitive King or with his wife, even though she had promised to hand it over to the Maharaja as soon as Shah Shuja reached Lahore.

Shah Shuja was told that Ranjit Singh was prepared to buy it. Even earnest money amounting to Rs. 50,000 was sent to him as a token of good faith regarding this offer to pay him adequate price for it. Into this trap, Shah Shuja was caught. He gave an indication to sell the diamond, which was an indirect confirmation of the fact that it was with him and that the story of his having mortgaged it at Kandhar was not true. As soon as the Maharaja became sure of the fact that the diamond was actually in Shah's possession, he was overjoyed and decided to carry out his

plan to its logical conclusion. The Afghan King was offered a cash price of Rs. Three Lacs and the grant of a Jagir of Rs. 50,000 per annum. He assented to this and on "29th of Samadi-ul-Awwal" (1st of June 1813 A.D.) Faqir Aziz-ud-din, Bhai Gurbaksh Singh and Jamadar Khushal Singh went to Shah Shuja and asked for the diamond. The Shah replied that the Maharaja should personally take delivery of it. Ranjit Singh was very glad to hear this news !

Sohan Lal, the Vakil of Maharaja's Court writes thus : "His Exalted Majesty on hearing of this news with great cheerfulness, came out of the Fort and riding a horse with the speed of wind and accompanied with a few high officials and posting one thousand foot-soldiers on his left and right came to the Haveli. There he was received by Shah Shuja with due respect and honour, and he bended his knee to him out of courtesy. All other courtiers and dignitaries stood up with folded hands. Both then being seated, a solemn pause ensued which lasted nearly for an hour. At length the patience of Ranjit Singh being exhausted, he whispered in the ear of one of Shah's attendants who reminded the latter of the object of the meeting. The Shah returned no answer, but made a signal with his eye to one of his servants, who retired and after a while brought in a small roll which he placed on the carpet at an equal distance between the two Chiefs." Ranjit Singh, "after friendly

protestations stained a paper with Saffron and swearing by the Granth of Baba Nanak and his own sword. He wrote the following security and compact : That he delivered over the provinces of Kile Cambleeh, Jhang Sar and Khuleh Noor to us and our heirs for ever, also to offer assistance in troops and treasure for the purpose of again recovering our throne. We also agreed that if we should ever ascend the throne, to consider Ranjit Singh always in the light of an ally. He then proposed himself that we should change turbans which is among the Sikhs a pledge of eternal friendship and we then gave him the Koh-i-Noor.”¹

When the Koh-i-Noor was presented to the Maharaja, he asked from the Shah its price. The vexed monarch replied that its price was the sword and then kept silent. Wafa Begum had before this given an idea of the price like this : ‘If a man were to throw stones on all sides with all his might and then threw one upwards towards the heaven, and jewels and gold were amassed in the atmosphere thus indicated by the throwing of stones ; that would constitute the price of the great diamond. Ranjit Singh was everjoyed to get the historic diamond and though one can well imagine the inward pangs which the unfortunate Afghan king must have been suffering at parting with one of his most valued possessions to which he had been so tenaciously sticking, in face of such heavy odds, he revealed a wonderful self-complacency while

1. Shah Shujah's Autobiography.



MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH

“Just before his death, Maharaja Ranjit Singh directed that the Koh-i-Noor be sent down to the Temple of Jagannath at Puri. But his Sirdars refused on the grounds that not such another diamond in the world existed and that the whole wealth of India could not purchase it. Had the needful been done at that time, the history of the Koh-i-Noor in later years would have been quite different.”

handing it over to Ranjit Singh, in return for his promises, which ultimately proved to be empty.

As soon as Ranjit Singh got hold of the diamond he put it into his pocket and retired forthwith to gloat over his new possession. He held a grand Durbar in honour of this unique event and the city was magnificently decorated and illuminated. A Court diarist thus describes the event :

“Diohri of Maharaja Ranjit Singh Bahadur ; Tuesday, dated 8th of June, 1813 (8th Jamadi-us-Sani 1228 A. H.) the Royal Fort, Lahore.

“Yesterday the Hon’ble Sarkar kept showing the Koh-i-Noor which had been very kindly given to him by Hazrat Shah Shuja-ul-Mulk, to the jeweller from whom he asked its price. It was found in weight equal to three hundred and a few more *Surakhs* and in value it was declared priceless as no other similar jewel existed anywhere else.” Sohan Lal gives its weight as 42 mashas or 336 rattis. This shows that by the time Koh-i-Noor reached the hands of Ranjit Singh it had diminished in weight by about 38 carats. This decrease may be attributed to various causes. It is just possible that during the wars between Zaman Shah and Shah Shuja, it might have been broken or else some one of them may have sold a piece taken out of it in times of need.

One can easily imagine the great delight of Maharaja Ranjit Singh when he was able to secure the cherished diamond after trying so many methods, some of which can even be described as questionable.

CHAPTER XII

Ranjit Singh and the Koh-i-Noor

The difficulties in attaining a thing, they say, increase its value. This was never more true than in the case of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He was able to secure the Koh-i-Noor with the greatest difficulty. He tried all means, persuasion, bargaining and even coercion. So when he got it after trying all these methods, this invaluable diamond became all the more valuable for him. He deposited it with the greatest care in a place of safety, the secret of which was known only to a trusted few. The Maharaja generally carried it with him wherever he went.

Mir Maharaj, the treasurer of the Maharaja, into whose custody it remained for a considerably long time and from whose possession it was ultimately taken by the British, writing about it says : "It was at time set alone (singly) in an enamelled setting, with strings to be worn as an armlet. He (Ranjit Singh) placed it on his arm, and admired it, then, after a time, replaced it in its box, which with the topaz, he made over to Beli Ram, to be placed in the *Tosha Khana*, under the charge of Mir Bustee Ram, *Tosha Khanea*. The Toshakhana, being then in the Moti Bazaar at the house of Ramsaker Gurwai (now Lal Singh's Toshakhana) he placed it in a chest there. After a little while, it was

taken by the Maharaja to Amritsar, under charge of Beli Ram, along with other articles of the *Tosha Khana*, and it was carried along with the Maharaja, wherever he went, under a strong guard."¹

"It was always carried in a large camel trunk, placed on the leading Camel (but this was known only to the people of the *Tosha Khana*). The whole string of camels, which generally consisted of about one hundred, was well guarded by troops. In camp, this box was placed between two others alike, close to the pole of the tent (Missar Beli Ram's bed being very close to it) none but his relatives and confidential servants having access to the place."

The Maharaja wore Koh-i-Noor only on State occasions and even then for a short while only. Immediately after it was taken from Shah Shuja, it was used as an armlet or *bazu-band*, as it is properly called. After about five years, it was fitted up as a *Sispesh* and used on the Maharaja's turban. To it was attached a diamond drop of a *tola* in weight. After another year it was fitted in the pole suspender for his horse; but again it was studded in the armlet with a diamond each on both sides. They were, however, smaller in size than the Koh-i-Noor. In this shape, it remained for over twenty years and when it was surrendered to the British, it was still there in the armlet.

1. Lady Login : "Sir John Login and Daleep Singh." pp. 195—198

Ranjit Singh loved it so much that he showed it to every distinguished guest, who came to his Durbar. Many European travellers saw it with the Maharaja and every one who had an occasion to do so admired the sparkling splendour of this unrivalled diamond. In 1838 when Lord Auckland's Military Secretary, the Hon'ble Mr. H. W. G. Osborne, paid a visit to the Sikh Court, he specially expressed his desire to see the Koh-i-Noor. It was at once sent for. Writing about it, Mr. Osborne says: "It is certainly the most magnificent diamond, about an inch and a half in length and upwards of an inch in width and stands out from the setting about half an inch. It is in the shape of an egg and is set in a bracelet between two very handsome diamonds of about half its size. It is valued at about three million sterling, is very brilliant and without a flaw of any kind."

The diamond remained with Ranjit Singh till his death in 1839. "Shortly before the death of Ranjit Singh," says Mir Maharaj, "Raja Dhyani Singh Wazir sent for Beli Ram, and stated that the Maharaja had expressed, by signs, that he wished the Koh-i-Noor to be given away in charity (the Maharaja being then speechless). Missar Beli Ram objected saying that 'it was only fit to be possessed by a king and to whom could it be given in charity?' Raja Dhyani Singh said: 'to the Brahmins at Jagannath.' But Beli Ram objected to this, stating that it ought to remain with the Maharaja's descendants and that already twenty-one lakhs of rupees and jewels

and gold etc. had been given away to the Brahmins. He thus exposed himself to the greatest enmity on the part of Raja Dhyan Singh and after the accession of Maharaja Kharak Singh and the assassination of Chet Singh, Raja Dhyan Singh obtained uncontrolled power and threw Missar Beli Ram in prison where he was kept for four months ; the keys of the *Toshakhana* having been handed over to Tej Chand."

Sohan Lal gives an account of this episode in his own way. He says : "Bhai Gobind Ram requested that the Exalted Sarkar had frequently uttered from the blessed tongue that the past kings had gone leaving the Koh-i-Noor behind them and none of the Sultans had taken it with him. So his heart's desire is that after entrusting the affairs of State to Kanwarjee, I should retire to Holy Places and place this diamond on the head of Shri Jagannath Ji. Now that this sudden calamity has come, he had told by signs to observe *Sankalp* and reach Jagannath Ji with all haste. The Bhai told that this order was made to the Raja. The Raja requested that the order was meant for Kanwarjee. After this, Kanwarjee was ordered (to produce the diamond). Kanwarjee stated that it was with Missar Beli Ram. Then Jamadar Khushal Singh asked Missar Beli Ram to bring forth the diamond. The Missar prevaricated and said it was at Amritsar. On this reply of the Missar, the Jamadar reprimanded him and told him, "You have come to the Exalted Sarkar for this (service). All the wealth and the property

belongs to the Kanwars." The Exalted Sarkar, on hearing this altercation, became angry. Then on the request of Bhai Gobind Ram, the *Sankalp* was done with an armlet, two diamonds, articles worth two lakhs, inlaid ornaments, eight crowns, two elephants with golden 'howdas' and five lakhs of rupees in cash. The Exalted Presence put on all the ornaments and then removing them from the body fell down in prostration and observed the *Sankalp* (with the words) that this was the last apparel."¹

About this very incident the Hon'ble Emily Eden wrote in a letter to her sister thus: "Simla, Monday, July 19, 1839. We heard of dear old Ranjit's death on Saturday. It took place on the 27th June. It is rather fine, because so unusual in the East, that even to the last moments his slightest signs (for he had long lost his speech) were obeyed. It is almost a pity they were, only that one is glad such a master mind should have its due to the last; but the despatch says, that on the last day the Maharaja sent for all his famous jewels, his horses with their splendid strappings, and pearls given him and ordered them to be sent to different shrines with directions that the *Brahmins* should pray for him that Kharak Singh (the heir) and the Sirdars who were sitting round his bed burst into loud lamentations and said, "What will become of

1. Translated from the original in Persian.

us if you give everything away ?” and the Maharaja wept but said it must be so. Then he ordered the Koh-i-Noor (the famous diamond) to be sent down to the Temple of Jagannath, but his Sirdars again represented that not such another diamond in the world existed and that the whole wealth of India could not purchase it and he consented to let that remain. But the distribution of the jewels went on till the evening and he is supposed, his news writers say, to have given away the value of two crores of rupees ; it is a great pity that such a collection of precious stones, quite unequalled, should be dispersed to these shrines, where they will never be seen again.”

Yet another account of this episode reads : “During the last days of his illness, prayers were said and offerings were sent to the different shrines for his recovery and His Highness bestowed in charity money, jewels, and other property to the value of nearly 50 lakhs of rupees. Among his jewels, he directed the well-known Koh-i-Noor to be sent to the temple of Jagannath at Puri, muttering at the same time the great truth, ‘no one carried with him his wordly wealth and that such a bequest would perpetuate his name.’ But Missar Beli Ram objected to its delivery on the ground of its being ‘State property’.

CHAPTER XIII

Koh-i-Noor, Shah Shuja and Wafa Begum

Maharaja Ranjit Singh instead of being satisfied with having got that big prize became avaricious. He thought that Shah Shuja must be in possession of many other jewels like the Koh-i-Noor. The great self-composure with which he parted with this invaluable diamond confirmed this idea of the Maharaja, who now thought of depriving the Afghan King of his other jewels. Shah Shuja, who had been allowed to see his wife two days after handing over Koh-i-Noor to the Maharaja, was thinking of formulating some plans to secure back his throne ; but once again events took just the opposite turn. Instead of fulfilling his promise of helping him to try his luck, Ranjit Singh determined to take possession of all the jewels that were left in his possession. He was charged with corresponding secretly with Mohammed Azim Khan, the Governor of Kashmir, and as a punishment he was taken into custody once again.

In vain did Shah Shuja protest against this treatment. He pleaded with the Maharaja that such behaviour towards a fellow king in trouble was not becoming on the part of so valiant a King as Maharaja Ranjit Singh was, but the latter was not prepared to give an ear to these arguments. He was bent upon having the

other jewels also in all the ways open to him.

In 1816 when the Sikh Ruler marched towards Peshawar, he took Shah Shuja along with him. As soon as Ranjit Singh reached Rohtas, Fateh Khan fled towards Kabul. The former did not like to pursue him further as he was not fully prepared for it. He, therefore, returned to Lahore, leaving Shah Shuja at Rawalpindi in the custody of Sardar Ram Singh. Here a thorough search was made of all the belongings of Shah Shuja, but no jewels were found in his possession. When Ram Singh failed to find anything with him and was even unsuccessful in making Shuja agree to his handing over his other jewels to Ranjit Singh, the Shah was conveyed to Lahore under strict surveillance.

On reaching Lahore the Shah was kept along with other members of his family in some unknown place and a heavy guard was put on him. Shah Shuja was now desperate and decided to employ desperate methods, which would either put him out of the Maharaja's reach or destroy him. He managed the escape of Wafi Begum with all the jewels and after experiencing many hardships and miseries she was at last able to cross the Sutlej and delivered herself to the British at Ludhiana. After Wafi Begum, her son Prince Taimoor tried to reach Ludhiana and join his mother but the news of his attempt leaked out and he was arrested and produced before Ranjit Singh who was wild with rage. It was then that he learnt from the Prince that her mother Wafi

Begum had been successful in making good her escape, with all her gems and jewels. Maharaja Ranjit Singh was now helpless as by this time Wafa Begum had gone out of his hands.

The guard on Shah Shuja was further strengthened and increased to four thousand. In addition about twenty torchmen were constantly keeping his camp illuminated all the night. He gave strict orders that if the Shah was able to escape with his life, the guard would be severely punished. No servant of the Shah was allowed to step out and none from outside was able to go in, so that communication with the Shah was totally stopped. The Shah, as we have stated above, had grown desperate and had decided not to leave any stone unturned to effect his escape. By rewards, promises and sweet words he was able to win one of the guards named Balak Ram to his side. Through Balak Ram the Afghan King was able to secure the necessary weighments by means of which a hole was made in the roof of his cell. When the arrangements of his escape were completed, one of the attendants of the Shah named Haji Rajah was dressed in the apparel of Shah Shuja. He was also trained to act, behave and talk like the imprisoned king.

Other servants were directed to show all honour and respect to him as if he were the real king. Having done this, one lucky night Shuja came out of his cell and escaped in the guise of a mendicant and thus the once king of

Afghanistan ingloriously stepped out of Lahore to which he was received on the back of 'gilded strappinged horses'. He was accompanied by his two trusted servants, Mir Abu-ul-Hassan Khan and Mir Abu-ul-Talale Khan. He made a futile attempt to re-conquer Kashmir with the help of the Governor of Afghanistan. So crest-fallen and beaten, this fugitive king decided to join his wife, Wafa Begum, who was living at Ludhiana under the protection of the British who were showing every consideration and respect to her, besides granting her a handsome stipend to make a decent living. When Shah Shuja reached Ludhiana, he was received most cordially by the British, 'who withered by motives of humanity from refusing them that protection under which they have thrown themselves'.¹

At this juncture it would not be out of place to mention that the escape of Shah Shuja would not have been possible had not Balak Ram, one of the guards posted at the Haveli where he was confined, helped him in carrying out his plans of escape. After his flight a searching enquiry was made and all the property of Balak Ram at Lahore and Amritsar was confiscated. In addition to this, he was also arrested and imprisoned. Shah Shuja entertained feelings of gratitude for the man who took pity on him in his miserable plight and helped him to carry out a plan which was

1. P. C. R. II page 425 from J. Adams to Captain Birch at Ludhiana dated 14-12-1814.

subsequently to put the Shah on the throne of Kabul, an event of which he had never dreamt.

It happened thus : In those days the Governor-General of India, Lord Auckland, scented danger from Russia. It was being talked that Russia was making preparations to attack India by way of Kabul. So it was necessary to have a friendly Afghanistan. With this end in view, the Governor-General sent a mission to Amir Dost Mohammed Khan who was at that time on the throne of Kabul. The Amir did not like the idea of siding with the British and started putting conditions which it was not easy for them to accede to. For example, he demanded that they should help him in winning back Peshawar from Ranjit Singh who had always been on very friendly terms with them. The Governor-General could not possibly alienate the loyal friendship of the Sikh Ruler in exchange for a doubtful alliance with the Amir of Afghanistan. At the same time it was not safe to have an antagonistic Afghanistan at a time when there was the genuine danger of Russian invasion. So Lord Auckland decided to espouse the cause of Shah Shuja who was a direct descendant of Nadir Shah as against Dost Mohammad who was a usurper and had no right to the throne of Kabul. He took into his confidence Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the combined armies of the Sikhs and the British defeated Dost Mohammed. Shah Shuja, the fugitive king, who had seen the rise and fall of fortune a number of times, saw himself

once again on the Throne of Afghanistan, for which he had lost all hopes. This unfortunate king, however, was not spared for long to enjoy his good fortune, because he was assassinated soon after.

This episode of Shah Shuja and Maharaja Ranjit Singh, with reference to Koh-i-Noor, is a matter of great controversy between different historians and commentators. One party holds that the Sikh Ruler was unnecessarily cruel to Shah Shuja who was entirely at his mercy and had thrown himself in his protection unreservedly. To shower indignities at him in his misfortune was unbecoming. The means adopted were unnecessarily humiliating and unworthy of a great monarch like Ranjit Singh. He ought to have, they aver, adopted a more dignified manner especially when he knew that the Afghan King was absolutely in his power and would have to bow to his will. Moreover, Ranjit Singh did not fulfil his part of the terms on which Koh-i-Noor was handed over to him by Shah Shuja. Not only that, but he continued his persecutions even after the great diamond came into his possession, with a view to squeeze out all of his jewels from the unfortunate king. The Maharaja after getting Koh-i-Noor wanted to have another well-known ruby which was also once a proud possession of the Moghul Rulers and was given to Nadir Shah by Mohammad Shah Rangila along with the Koh-i-Noor. The attitude of the Maharaja, they argue, cannot be justified on any grounds.

The other point of view is that Ranjit Singh cannot be blamed for the ordeal through which Shah Shuja and his family had to pass before handing over the Koh-i-Noor. The wife of Shah Shuja, Wafa Begum, had made a solemn promise to hand over the diamond to the Sikh Ruler as soon as Shah Shuja reached Lahore. It was a fact that a strong Sikh army had been despatched to attack Kashmir where Shuja was imprisoned by the Governor, Ata Mohammad Khan. The fact that the Afghan army of Fateh Khan was the first to reach Srinagar did not matter at all, because the Sikh armies had played their part equally well. It was a result of the joint operations of the two armies that Ata Mohammad was defeated and that Shuja had been released. So when he reached Lahore there was absolutely no reason why the promised Koh-i-Noor should be withheld from the Maharaja under the terms of the solemn assurance for the fulfilment of which respectable Nobles of Wafa Begum had stood sureties. It was clearly a breach of the solemn promise made and if the diamond was being withheld in breach of that promise, the Maharaja was quite justified in using other methods to get it. Not only was the diamond not handed over to him but it was denied that it was with them. Shah Shuja in fact gave out that while in Kandhar he had mortgaged it in order to raise funds. This constituted not only a breach of promise, but an attempt to deceive a party which had faithfully carried out his part of the contract.

As for the confinement of Shah Shuja after the handing over of the diamond to Ranjit Singh and the latter's failure to carry out the promises made at the time of handing over the diamond, it is argued that it was Shah Shuja who was the first to break the terms of the understanding arrived at that time. It will be remembered that on that occasion Ranjit Singh and Shah Shuja had exchanged *turbans* as a token of their being brothers. The Afghan King was not justified in opening secret negotiations with the Governor of Kashmir, against the interests of Ranjit Singh who had helped him in coming out of the former's clutches. Shah Shuja had been accused of doing so after a thorough enquiry and unimpeachable evidence was produced to prove that. Shah Shuja could not offer any explanation to rebut the charge levelled against him. How could Ranjit Singh then, this point of view argues, allow a person to remain at liberty ? So even after exchanging turbans with him, he began to plot against him with their erstwhile common enemy.

Whatever be the strength in arguments advanced by these respective points of view, the whole episode is nauseating, indeed. In fact, the whole history of this ill-omened diamond is full of such episodes and efforts for the sake of its possession. We have seen kings being blinded, murdered and we have seen kingdoms being overthrown and strong men breaking into controversies raging round this strange

diamond which brought misery to so many and good luck only to a few. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Koh-i-Noor played a very important part in the three countries, India, Persia and Afghanistan, before it reached the shores of England to adorn the Crown of the Queen of England.



PRINCE DALEEP SINGH

“It is difficult to form any idea about the real feelings of Daleep Singh when he had the historical Diamond on the palm of his hand and at the time when he is alleged to have made a present of it to Her Majesty Queen Victoria. Was this gift an act of grace or an expression of his utter helplessness in the matter?”

CHAPTER XIV

After Ranjit Singh—The Deluge

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was the first and the last powerful Sikh monarch. From humble beginnings, he rose to make history by virtue of his unique fighting skill, spirit of adventure and indomitable courage. He was a born leader of men and inspired feelings of loyalty and devotion in his followers. It was not an easy job to weld into a homogeneous unit the Khalsa Chiefs, antagonistic to one another and always warring between themselves ; but he worked the miracle. With a band of devoted generals at his beck and call, who were ready to do or die for him, he was able to carve out for himself a glorious Empire, the boundries of which extended from Peshawar to Sutlej and from Kashmir to Multan. He even went beyond Peshawar and invaded the Afghan territory, creating awe in the hearts of his opponents. His distinguished band of Generals who spread in all directions, subduing the rebellious and conquering fresh lands for him, compare favourably with the bravest of the brave of all times of human history. It was the unconquerable spirit of Maharaja Ranjit Singh that helped him to build an Empire and maintain it.

He was not only a skilled general but also a seasoned administrator and a shrewd statesman. It is strange that even though quite

illiterate, he gave proof of wonderful intelligence. Great was his wisdom as also his political foresight. By his liberal policy and wide healthy outlook he created around him an atmosphere of goodwill and loyalty equalled only by Akbar the Great. Amongst his commanders and generals were Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs and even foreigners, all of whom were trusted by the Maharaja. They in return always vied with one another in their loyalty and devotion to him. To his subjects, he administered justice, irrespective of caste, colour and creed. For their welfare he was always up and doing. All these factors combined to give to the Maharaja a name which is remembered upto this day by his countrymen with feelings of admiration, devotion and pride.

He was fond of pomp and show. His *durbars* were imposing and he loved his valuable possessions, especially the invaluable Koh-i-Noor of which he was both fond and proud. He always exhibited it to his distinguished guests with great zest. It remained in the custody of Missar Beli Ram who was in charge of the Tosha Khana. The subsequent history of Koh-i-Noor would have been quite different but for this faithful and loyal officer of the Royal household. It is said that while Ranjit Singh lay on death-bed and all hope of his recovery was lost, a priest of the household suggested that the diamond should be sent to Jagannath Temple as a present from the dying king. This gift of the most valued possession

of the King to the deity would, he suggested, restore his health. Ranjit Singh assented with a nod, as he was unable to speak, but Missar Beli Ram, when approached, refused to part with this historical diamond stating that he required specific orders from the Maharaja to do so. Maharaja Ranjit Singh expired soon after and so his devoted Dewan saved the Koh-i-Noor for the Royal successors of Ranjit Singh.

But after Maharaja Ranjit Singh, there was the deluge. The old tribal jealousies of the Nobility, which the Maharaja had been controlling and curbing, raised their ugly head and the Court of the deceased ruler became a hot-bed of intrigues and conspiracies. Maharaja Kharak Singh who succeeded his father was a weak man. Though well-meaning, he had none of the great qualities of his distinguished father. He could not check the rising monster of court mechanizations and soon lost control over his Nobles. The result was that he was imprisoned and his young son Naunihal Singh was seated on the Throne.

He was a promising lad with a personality of his own. He was brilliant, smart and brave. Had he lived he would have proved a worthy successor of Ranjit Singh, but alas ! he too fell a victim to Court intrigues. Maharaja Kharak Singh having died while in custody, Naunihal Singh, while returning from the cremation, was killed by the falling of a door of the Hazari Bagh. This happened in 1840.

In January 1841, Sher Singh was crowned

King. He was the second son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He was a man of high ideals. Justice-loving and God-fearing, he took particular care of the common people and saw that they were not troubled or looted by any law-breakers. During his brief reign cases of dacoity, murder and high-handedness by the officers were on the decrease. With all these good qualities, he was ease-loving and passed most of his time in the *Baradari* built by the late Maharaja, just opposite the Lahore Fort. This gave a long rope to the intriguing Sirdars who conspired against him. One fine morning, when Maharaja Sher Singh was busy enjoying playing of fountains emitting rose water, Sandhanwalia Sardars rushed into the fort and murdered the trusted Prime Minister of the Maharaja, Raja Dhian Singh. From there they bounced forward and with one stroke of the sword, they cut the head of the unsuspecting King. From him they turned to the heir-apparent, Kumar Partap Singh, a promising lad who had made a great impression on Lord Elinborough, the Governor-General of India, when the former went to see him at Ferozepur. When the young Prince saw the assassins running after him, he folded his hands and entreated, "Uncle, I shall clean your stables, pray do not kill me;" but the cruel assassins-the Sandhanwalia Sardars-paid no heed to his entreaties and killed him. Their plot to seize power, however, did not succeed even after all these foul deeds. Raja Hira Singh, the son of Raja Dhian Singh and his brother Raja Gulab Singh gathered their

men near Lahore and gave a crushing defeat to the men of Sandhanwalia Sardars. The heartless assassins were beheaded and Maharaja Daleep Singh, the infant son of the late Maharaja Ranjit Singh, was seated on the throne with Raja Hira Singh as his Prime Minister.

Koh-i-Noor was presented to the late Maharaja Sher Singh at the time of his Coronation by Raja Gulab Singh, the brother of Raja Dhian Singh and after his assassination, the Koh-i-Noor came into the possession of the infant Maharaja Daleep Singh.

CHAPTER XV

How it came into the hands of the British

With a young and inexperienced King at the head of the State, the Sikh Nobles and Sirdars instead of rallying round their monarch and coming to the rescue of the tottering Sikh Empire, which Maharaja Ranjit Singh had built up with his might and wisdom, began to grind their own axes. Every one of them was thirsty for power and endeavoured by hook or crook to establish his own overlordship. They were torn asunder by mutual jealousies and their greed blinded them so that they could not see the right path. The result was that the mighty Sikh Empire which had struck terror into the hearts of Afghan warriors across the Indus, broke down with a crash.

Raja Hira Singh who had avenged so dramatically the death of Maharaja Sher Singh and his Prime Minister, Raja Dhian Singh, his own father, was chosen as the Prime Minister of Maharaja Daleep Singh. This was not liked by Maharaja's maternal uncle, Raja Jawahar Singh, and Sardar Suchet Singh, the uncle of Raja Hira Singh. Both of them were themselves aspirants for the job, which the latter had obtained by virtue of his fearlessness, bravery and skill with which he handled the delicate situation after the cruel assassination of Maharaja Sher Singh. He was popular with

the Khalsa Army with whose help he was able to capture his uncle who was subsequently killed. He did not spare his comrades and associates, which included Kashmira Singh, (another son of the late Maharaja Ranjit Singh) and other Sandhanwalia Sirdars. He was, however, unable for long to hold the reins of power. In fact the internal intrigues and mutual jealousies of the Sikh Sirdars, who had at one time been the pillars of the Sikh Throne, had assumed such dangerous dimensions that it was not possible for any one of them to remain in power for long. Jawahar Singh, brother of Rani Jindan, the mother of the young king, by virtue of his advantageous position gathered round him a number of Sikh Sirdars and besieged the *Haveli* of Raja Hira Singh. It was not possible for the latter to offer any resistance on account of the superior number of the forces surrounding them. In consultation with Missar Jalla, one of his trusted lieutenants, he managed to escape with all the treasures and jewels in his custody ; but Raja Jawahar Singh got the news of this daring bid for power. His men gave a hot pursuit to the fleeing party and near Kala Shah Kaku, about 10 miles from Lahore, the party was overtaken and put to the sword. Jawahar Singh then assumed power as Prime Minister of his young nephew. He too shared the sad fate of his predecessor. One Peshawara Singh, a popular Sikh Sirdar, was put to the sword. This created a flutter in the ranks of the army which suspected the hand of the Prime Minister in this cruel assassination.

They revolted and Raja Jawahar Singh was, in the very presence of his sister Rani Jindan, beheaded. Raja Lal Singh was then chosen as the Prime Minister of the tottering Sikh State.

Raja Lal Singh was afraid of the Sikh Army. There was no love lost between the two. His policy was to keep the soldiers busy somewhere or other so that they might not turn their attention towards him. Rani Jindan had great confidence in Lal Singh and she backed him in his selfish policy. On the borders of the Sikh State, British armies were holding manoeuvres. Raja Lal Singh and Rani Jindan suspected that they were trying to take advantage of unsettled conditions of the Sikh Empire by precipitating some crisis in order to annex the fertile regions of the Punjab in their fast swelling Empire. They, therefore, induced the Sikh Nobles to unite in face of the common enemy. A huge army under Raja Teja Singh, forty-two thousand strong, besides ten regiments of infantry and strong cavalry were despatched to attack the British forces. Raja Teja Singh was supported by Lal Singh himself with a force of infantry, twenty-two thousand strong. The first fight took place at Mudki near Ferozepur on 18th December 1845. Raja Lal Singh fled from the battle at a critical time resulting in the defeat of the Sikh Army. The second encounter took place at Bhai Bhairon on 21st December 1845. Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy and Commander-in-Chief, was himself leading the British Forces. The

Sikh army gave proof of its mettle and offered a very tough resistance to the trained British forces. Now it was the turn of Raja Teja Singh to take to his heels. His flight decided the fate of this battle. At Bheronwal, the Sikhs were defeated once again. They, however, gathered their scattered forces and met the British army at Ali Wal in 1846. This time it was another chief, Sardar Ranjodh Singh, who fled and sealed the fate of the Khalsa. Sardar Sham Singh Atariwala, the father-in-law of the late Maharaja Naunihal Singh was now chosen as the Supreme Commander of the Khalsa forces. He gave a very tough fight to the British at *Sabraon*. His lead of the Khalsa forces was distinguished by the dramatically bold stand made by the Sikh soldiers and for a time their victory seemed almost certain ; but alas ! fate once again cast its die against them. The brave Commander-in-Chief, Sham Singh Atariwala, was killed in action. As soon as the soldiers came to know that they had become leaderless they ran away helter-skelter. On 11th of February 1846, the British forces entered Kasur. These battles weakened the Khalsa very much and many brave soldiers and generals were killed.

Finding further resistance useless, the Sikhs entered into negotiations with the British through Raja Gulab Singh and settled the following terms :—

- (i) Sikhs were to pay one and a half

crore of rupees as reparation to the British.

- (ii) All arms were to be surrendered to the British and size of the Sikh Army was to be considerably reduced.
- (iii) The British Government was to be given the power of supervision and control over the Lahore Durbar.
- (iv) Raja Lal Singh and Maharaja Daleep Singh were to be presented to the Governor-General.

Having got a hand in the affairs of the Lahore Durbar, the British began to play their favourite game of sowing seeds of discord amongst the Sikh Nobility which was already torn asunder by a thousand rivalries and jealousies. Their internal differences were widened and manipulated and each one of them was set against the other in such a skilful manner that in a very short time the Khalsa Nobility was reduced to utter helplessness. Raja Lal Singh was interned at Benaras, where after a short while he was joined by Rani Jindan, who was also ordered to quit the Punjab. A Council of Regency consisting of eight members under the presidency of Sir John Lawrence, the Pesident, was formed to look after the affairs of the State.

Now, no one was left to organise the failing forces of the Khalsa and every one of the once ferocious Khalsa Chiefs became tame as a mb. Only Dewan Mool Raj, Governor of

Multan, did not stoop before the British and maintained his dignity and independence. He was a thorn in the side of the British who were determined to establish their overlordship in the fertile Punjab. On some pretence or other Dewan Sawan Mal who was proving an impediment in the way of the British design over the Punjab, had to be removed. A handle to do so was soon found and accounts were demanded from him. By raising many a storm in the tea cup, the British managed to capture Dewan Mool Raj and he was sentenced to transportation for life. This brave man, luckily or unluckily, died during his journey to the gaol.

Dewan Sawan Mal, the son of Dewan Mool Raj, was able to secure the help and co-operation of various Sirdars who united to make a last bid to wrest power which was quickly passing out of their hands. At Ram Nagar, Saadulapur and Chalianwala, fierce battles were fought which proved very costly to both the sides. The Sikh army was fighting under the command of Sardar Sher Singh and inflicted some crushing defeats on the British forces but the star of the Khalsa was fast sinking and they could not fight the fates which had ranged themselves against them on the side of the British. At Gujrat the last big battle was fought on 12th March 1849, where after showing wonderful feats of valour, the Khalsa army at last capitulated to the superior and better organised forces. On the 29th of March 1849, the Punjab was annexed to the British Empire by

Lord Dalhousie. The Treaty drawn on this occasion effaced from existence the glorious Empire which the courage, wisdom and strategy of Maharaja Ranjit Singh had so magnificently built. The chief terms of this Treaty were as below :—

- (i) His Highness Maharaja Daleep Singh shall resign for himself, his soldiers and his successors, all rights, titles and claims to the sovereignty of the Punjab or to any sovereign power whatsoever.
- (ii) All property of the State of whatever description and wheresoever found, shall be confiscated to the Hon'ble East India Company in part payment of the debt due by the State of Lahore to the British Government and of the expenses of the war.
- (iii) The gem called Koh-i-Noor which was taken from Shah Shuja-ul-Mulk by Maharaja Ranjit Singh shall be surrendered by the Maharaja of Lahore to the Queen of England.
- (iv) His Highness Daleep Singh shall receive from the Hon'ble East India Company for the support of himself, his relatives and the servants of the State, a pension of not less than four and not exceeding five lacs of Company's rupees per annum.
- (v) His Highness Daleep Singh shall be treated with respect and honour. He

shall retain the title of Maharaja Daleep Singh Bahadur and he shall continue to receive during his life such portion of the pension above-mentioned as may be allotted to him personally, provided he shall reside at such place as the Governor-General of India may select.

This treaty called the Treaty of Lahore was drawn and accepted at Lahore on the 29th of March 1849 and ratified by the Right Hon'ble the Governor-General on the 5th of April 1849.

Lord Dalhousie felt very proud of his achievement in adding a rich and fertile province to the British Empire in India. Writing about it to his friends at home, he said, "What I have done, I have done on my own responsibility. I think it to be just, politic and necessary, my conscience tells me the work is one I can pray God to bless, and I shall await the decision of the country with perfect tranquillity. If the Government disapproved of my act, you will see me at Frogmore before summer is over. If they sanction and approve (as unless they are maniacs they must do) their approval must be full and conspicuous. It is not every day that an officer of their Government adds four millions of subjects to the British Empire and places the historical jewel of the Moghul Emperors in the Crown of her sovereign."

It would be interesting to read the following remarks of Mr. Ludlow in this connection.

Their humour and sense of sarcasm are worthy of note :

“Daleep Singh was an infant, his minority was only to end in 1854. We were his declared protectors. On our last advance into his country we had proclaimed (18th November 1848) that we came to punish insurgents and to put down all ‘armed opposition to the constituted authority’. We fulfilled that pledge by annexing his whole country within six months. On the 24th March 1849, the kingdom of Punjab was declared to be at an end, the child, our protege, was pensioned off; all State property confiscated to the Company, the celebrated diamond, the Koh-i-Noor, surrendered to the Queen. In other words, we ‘protected’ our word by taking his whole territory from him.

“If it was right to annex the Punjab, it should have been after the first Sikh War. Then the Sikhs were the aggressors, we had no pledges towards the boy sovereign, we were entitled, having conquered them, to make what terms we pleased. The quick eye of Sir Charles Napier saw this, he literally censured the blunder. But having once recognised and undertaken to protect ‘Daleep Singh, it was a mockery to punish him for the faults of his subjects. As between us and him in putting down insurrection, we were simply fulfilling our duty towards him. No such act on the part of his subjects could give us any title against him. Fancy, if you can, a widow lady with a

house full of mutinous servants who turn out and attack the police. The police knock them on the head, walk into the house and kindly volunteer to protect the mistress against any violence on their part. A quarrel again breaks out, the treacherous are again successful and the inspector now politely informs the lady that her house and the estate on which it stands are no longer her own; but will be treated as fee to the Police that on being turned out she will receive an annuity equal to about one and six pence in the pound of her rental and that she must hand over for the use of the Chief Commissioner her best diamond necklace. Is this an exaggerated version of our conduct towards that innocent boy Daleep Singh now grown into a Christian gentleman."

The terms of the Treaty they certified, harsh as they were, were disregarded by the contracting party, the British conquerors. The terms as to the confiscation of the property and the territories were strictly followed but term regarding the pension to the helpless and unfortunate Maharaja was never carried out. Taking that ten rupees of the company could be exchanged for one pound sterling, he was entitled to about £45,000 per annum. But he was not paid that amount as would be clear from the details given below :

From 1846 to 1849	...	£12,000	per annum.
From 1856 to 1858	..	£15,000	„ „
From 1858 onwards	...	£25,000	„ „

These figures speak for themselves and constitute a sad commentary on the attitude of the British. The grabbing of the Koh-i-Noor was the most unjustifiable part of this harsh and unjust treaty of which Lord Dalhousie was so much proud. Why was this historical diamond snatched away from the young Maharaja ? There was absolutely no justification for this. But the history of this ill-omened diamond is so much full of such acts of high-handedness and injustice that this act of the British constituted only a link in a long chain. Shah Shuja had once remarked that this diamond could be acquired by the flash of the sword or could come through the grace of kings. To what category did this grabbing belong ?

It did not stop at that. Many other jewels of the young and innocent Maharaja, who was only a minor and could not be held responsible for what his Ministers or Generals did, were quietly taken away from him. No mention was made about them in the Treaty. It is stated that Lord Dalhousie was very particular about the jewels of the Sikh Treasury and had an eye on them long before the Sikh territories were actually annexed. He ordered a detailed inspection of the Maharaja's treasury and issued strict orders that none of the jewels, especially the Koh-i-Noor, should be allowed to be taken away. He ordered strong and reliable guard for the period of transition of the valuable jewels.

In this connection it would not be out of

place to quote here a passage from that valuable book of Bosworth, entitled "Life of Lord Lawrence"—"Shortly before the decree of annexation went forth, Lord Dalhousie had written to Henry Lawrence to make every disposition for the safe custody of State Jewels, which were about to fall into the lap of the English." In a letter dated April 27th on the subject of the Maharani, who had just escaped from our hands, he remarks, "This incident three months ago would have been inconvenient, now it does not signify so much, at the same time it is discreditable as I have been annoyed by the occurrence. As guardians seem so little to be trusted, I hope you have taken proper precautions in providing full security for the jewels and the crown property at Lahore, where removal would be a more serious affair than that of the Maharani.".....

"On entering a palace, which they dreamed would be stocked with valuables ready for English use, they found that the treasury was empty and the jewels were gone. Great care was, therefore, needed, especially as among the Punjab jewels was the matchless Koh-i-Noor, 'the Mountain of Light', which it was intended should be expressly surrendered by the young Maharaja to the English Queen."

So it would appear that great care was taken that this unique and historical jewel should not go out of the hands of its new masters.

CHAPTER XVI

Sir John Lawrence and Koh-i-Noor

Koh-i-Noor was brought out from the Toshakhana¹ by Dr. Login who was placed in charge of the minor Maharaja. It was then

1. A picture of the Toshakhana is thus drawn by Mr. Robert Adams, a cousin of Lady Login, in a letter written to her from Lahore on the 2nd of November 1849:—

“I wish that you could walk through that same Toshakhana and see its *wonders*! The vast quantities of gold and silver, the jewels, not to be valued, so many and so rich! the Koh-i-Noor, far beyond what I had imagined and perhaps above all the immense collection of magnificent Kashmere Shawls, rooms full of them laid out on shelves and heaped up in bails—it is not to be described! And all this made over to him (John Login) without *any list*, or public document of any sort, all put in his hands to set in order, value, sell etc, that speaks volumes, does it not, for the character that he bears, with those whose good opinions are worth having. Few men, I fancy, would have been so implicitly trusted.

“The old Treasurer Misr Maharaj gave him every assistance and said, ‘the relief to his mind was great at being free of responsibility’. He said that the Koh-i-Noor had been the cause of so many deaths having been fatal to so many of his own family, that he never expected to be spared.

“Login followed the advice given him by Misr Maharaj—when showing the jewels to visitors, to keep it in his own hand, with the ribbon cards that tied it as an armlet twisted round his fingers. It was still set, as before described, as an armlet with a diamond on each side of the Koh-i-Noor as a contrast of size.”

carefully deposited along with countless other jewels in the citadel underground.

The Koh-i-Noor was formally handed over to the Punjab Government, which consisted of three members, Sir Henry Lawrence, John Lawrence and C. G. Mausel with the former as President. By the Board the Koh-i-Noor was given in the custody of John Lawrence. Perhaps the other members of the Board thought him the most practical and business-like—and no doubt in most matters he was—of the three. But in this instance they misjudged their man. How could a man so careless of the conventionalities of life, a man who never wore a jewel on his person till ordered and when compelled to do so and even then he used to put them so remorselessly in the wrong place that the court *costumier* exclaimed in despair that he would lose reputation by him, in spite of all his pains—how, I ask, was it likely that such a man would realise the inestimable value of the jewel entrusted to him? And again, what was the custody of a court jewel compared with that of the happiness of the millions for which he was also responsible? Anyhow, half-unconsciously he thrust it, wrapped up in numerous folds of cloth, into his waistcoat pocket, the whole being contained in an insignificant little box, which could be thus easily put away. He went working as hard as usual, and thought no more of his precious treasure. He changed his clothes for dinner and threw his waistcoat aside, still forgetting all about the box containing it.

About six weeks afterwards a message came from Lord Dalhousie saying that the Queen had ordered the jewel to be at once transmitted to her. The subject was mentioned by Sir Henry at the Board, when John said quietly, "Send for it at once?" "Why, you've got it!" said Sir Henry. In a moment the fact of his carelessness flashed across him. He was horror-stricken and, as he used to describe his feelings afterwards, when telling the story, he said to himself, "Well, this is the worst trouble I have even yet got into. But such was the command over his countenance that he gave no external sign of trepidation. "Oh! yes, of course, I forgot about it", he said and went on with the business of the meeting as if nothing had happened. He soon, however, found an opportunity of slipping away to his private room and with his heart in his mouth sent for his old bearer and said to him: "Have you got a small box which was in my waistcoat pocket some time ago?" "Yes, Sahib," the man replied, "the diblia (the native word for it); I found it and put it in one of your boxes." "Bring it here," said the Sahib. Upon this the old bearer went to a broken down tin box and produced the little one from it. "Open it" said John Lawrence, "and see what is inside?" He watched the man anxiously enough as fold of the small rags was taken off and great was his relief when the precious gem appeared. The bearer seemed unconscious of the treasure which he had in his keeping. "There is nothing here Sahib!", he said, "but a bit of glass."

"The Koh-i-Noor was then quickly presented to the Board so that it might be forwarded to the Queen and when John Lawrence told them this story, great was the amusement it caused. The jewel passed, I am told on good authority, through one or other striking vicissitudes before it was safely lodged in the English crown. But never I feel sure whether flashing in the diadem of Turk or Moghul or in the uplifted sword of a Persian or Afghan or Sikh¹ conqueror did it pass through so strange a crisis or run a greater risk of being lost for ever than when it lay forgotten in the waistcoat pocket of John Lawrence or in the broken tin box of his aged bearer."

Still more adventures awaited the Koh-i-Noor. Its journey from Lahore to Bombay was full of perils and is described by Col. P. T. Etherton in an admirable article entitled "Diamond That Dazzled The World" published in "Everybody" Journal dated 7th Feb. 1953. This graphic account is reproduced below :

"The let-off gave Sir John such a fright that he applied at once for permission to send the stone to Bombay, a critical enterprise, owing to the dangers of the road, the immense value of the packet, and the length of time that would be taken by the 1300-mile journey.

1. The Koh-i-Noor was never placed in the crown by any Turk or Moghul possessor and was not studded in the hilt of any body's sword, Persian, Afghan or Sikh. This is evidently a mis-statement.

“In those days the road from Lahore to Bombay swarmed with robbers, dacoits and *Thugs*. The Thugs (pronounced Tug) caused great anxiety, for a robber comes at you fair and straight, but a Thug had so many dodges and disguises that you never knew when he was after you until the noose was round your neck.

“The Thugs were the gangsters of their day and their instrument of destruction was a silk handkerchief with which, by a dexterous movement, they strangled their victims. This, however, by no means, describes the full activities of these travelling killers.

“Strangling was a religious cult with them and considered to be an honourable profession. They often followed their intended victims for hundreds of miles ; they had a code of laws and neither women nor old men were strangled. Before taking the road, their deity was consulted and if the omens were unfavourable, they would not dream of starting.

“So powerful did they become that the Government determined to break up the organisation, which they eventually did under the direction of Captain Sleeman.

“Sir John Lawrence was set a problem as to how best to get the jewel to England, and what subsequently happened seems to be a matter of dispute. Some deny the part Lawrence played in it, whilst admitting that his role appears in accounts of the gem. It

would also seem that he sent two special messengers, to travel fast and alone, one with the precious packet, the other to act as a decoy.

“Anyway, a trustworthy officer was apparently chosen who carried the gem, and his ride became legendary. It was a tale that very nearly had no one left alive to tell it.

“The Thugs had got scent of the mission and it was clear that the officer, who was disguised as a *Moslem Merchant*, had to contend with the most formidable confederation of thieves and murderers in Asia. He had not travelled far when he was accosted one morning by a well-dressed and mounted Moslem, but without attendants. He suggested that in view of the dangers of the road the two sons of Islam should journey together, but the officer was too old in experience to be caught by so transparent a device. The new-comer, however, showed marked unwillingness to be shaken off, until he was told that he was at liberty to ride ahead or behind, but if in five minutes he was within pistol range the other would certainly have a crack at him. So the stranger checked his horse and fell behind. Farther on, and out of sight of the Thug—for he could be no other—the officer took shelter in a thicket with the object of discovering whether his affable friend was on his trail. In a short time he came along, and since their parting had so completely altered his appearance that no one would have known him for the same man. Imagine his

surprise when the officer recognised the person who had accosted him as a syce (groom) who had applied for a job a few days previously.

“The officer saw nothing more of his ‘friend’, but there is little doubt that he rode ahead of him all the way, warning the entire Thug community en route that the bearer of the Koh-i-Noor was within range of their nooses. Some days later he reached the bank of a broad river in full flood; to cross that night was impossible, so he decided to bivouac.

“Just after this two sepoy came up, and, shuddering at the sight of the rushing river, asked permission to camp by the officer’s fire, explaining that they belonged to a certain native regiment and were going home on furlough.

“After supper the sepoy retired to rest and were soon fast asleep. As the carrier of the gem lay smoking beside them, he sifted their story and discovered inaccuracies in their statement about a recent campaign. His suspicions turned to certainty when he saw that in choosing their positions for the night they had placed themselves one on each side of him. So he adopted such precautions as the circumstances demanded. He got up and quietly exchanged coverings with the man nearest to him, shifting his own position so as to leave the sepoy in the centre and himself on the flank. Then cocking his pistol, he lay watchful as a weasel, awaiting the result.

“About 3 o’clock, whilst it was still dark, the man sleeping farthest off arose and glided across to his comrade, who, covered by the officer’s cloak, occupied his former position. A moment or two later, he heard a horrible gurgling noise. When the strangler slackened the noose he threw off the covering to rifle the body; the starlight, which had not been bright enough to reveal his error, now cast a glint on the buttons of the uniform.

“Appalled at his mistake he turned quickly, only to see himself covered by a long cavalry pistol. Grovelling for mercy he was told to take the body to the river and swim across with it, which he did, striking out for the opposite bank he was never to reach in the still rushing torrent.

“A few days later in this awesome ride the officer found himself sleeping at an inn where the only other lodger was squalid-looking beggar. The night was intensely hot and both had a bowl of drinking water beside their sleeping mats. Although the officer had no reason to suspect his fellow lodger of sinister designs, he nevertheless adopted the precaution of placing a thin piece of *muslin* on the surface of the water in his bowl. Waking up in the middle of the night he struck a match and looked at the bowl; the *muslin* still floated on the water, but it had intercepted a quantity of fine brown powder that was not there when he went to sleep.

“Creeping over to where the man¹ was lying he detected a long handkerchief of faded yellow silk, wetted with a bullet at one end and stained with blood. Once again he turned the tables—this time by exchanging bowls, and, mounting his horse, rode away.

“This was only the beginning, for he had still to pass through the centre of the Thug country, the heart and focus of the great Thug system, gloomy jungles in the depths of which were situated temples where the Thugs worshipped with dreadful rites and dark incantations. Within a short distance of him were caves—deep graves containing murdered people buried by fifties, the head of one at the feet of the next, in the approved Thug fashion.

“The road leading past this gruesome spot was known among the Thugs by the humorous name of ‘strangle street’, for the entire population of the district were Thugs, deeply dyed in villainies innumerable and flourishing on the proceeds of murder.

“The carrier was a brave man and he rode on with the Koh-i Noor still safe in his pocket. Every stranger was suspect, for death had many disguises. But he trusted no one and slept as little as his strength would permit, until at last he pulled into Bombay.”

CHAPTER XVII

Daleep Singh presents Koh-i-Noor to Queen Victoria

When the diamond reached Bombay it was handed over to Lt.-Colonel Mackenson and Captain Ramsey for taking it most carefully to London. The two officers sailed with their precious trust forthwith and it was handed over to the Board of Directors. On of 3rd July 1850 this unique jewel was formally presented to Her Majesty Queen Victoria the Good by Sir J. W. Hogg, the Deputy Chairman of the East India Company.

In 1851, the Diamond was exhibited by Messrs. Osler in the Great Hyde Park Exhibition. A description of this matchless diamond thus appears in the official Description Catalogue of the exhibition :

H. M. The Queen Proprietor
The Great Diamond called
Koh-i-Noor, or the Mountain of Light Main Avenue
Jewel Case in Engine-cento
style designed by L. Grover

It is followed by a brief history of the Diamond from the days of the Mahabharata to the time of its acquisition by Queen Victoria.

The exhibitors prepared a glass imitation of

the historical Koh-i-Noor. It was an exact model and was later on presented to the Punjab Exhibition and is still preserved in the archives of the Lahore Museum.

The year next following, i. e., in 1852, the diamond was subjected to an unfortunate cutting operation which detracted a great deal from its uniqueness, beauty and lustre. The process was entrusted to Messrs. Garrad, the well-known diamond dealers, who secured the services of M. Voarsangar, a well-known diamond cutter from M. Coslier's at Amsterdam. The work was carried on in London and lasted for 38 days. When complete it reduced the diamond from 186 $\frac{1}{6}$ to 106 $\frac{1}{16}$ carats. The cost of the cutting was £8,000.

The results, as we have remarked above, were most unfortunate. A learned authority on the subject of diamonds, Mr. C. W. King, writing about the cutting, says, "A most ill-advised proceeding, which has deprived the stone of all its historical and minerological value; for as a specimen of a monster diamond whose native weight and form had been as little as possible diminished by Art (for the grand object of Hindu lapidary is to preserve the weight) it was unrivalled in Europe, and giving in their stead a badly shaped shallow brilliant but of inferior water and only 102 $\frac{1}{4}$ carats in weight."¹

The historic diamond, after it was cut, was

1. This is again incorrect. The weight is 106 $\frac{1}{16}$ carats.

shown to Maharaja Daleep Singh. How it was done, constitutes an exciting story not without pathos. The young Maharaja was living in London under the guardianship of Lady Login who had been appointed to take charge of him, after the death of her husband, Dr. Sir John Login. The episode is described at length in the book, "SIR JOHN LOGIN AND DALEEP SINGH" and we make no apologies for reproducing it here :

"Hitherto, since the arrival of the Maharaja in England, the subject of Koh-i-Noor had not been touched on in his presence ; his Governor and Lady Login were, however, well aware of his sentiments on the matter, as indeed he had made no secret of them. They knew that to him Koh-i-Noor meant something beyond a mere jewel of fabulous value in his eyes and in the eyes of the oriental nations ; it was an object of superstitious veneration as the symbol of Imperial Sovereignty over Hindustan and the countries adjacent marking its possession as chief amongst the rulers of Southern Asia. It was on this account that Ranjit Singh had made such strenuous efforts to get it into his hands, as setting the seal to his ambitious designs and for this reason too that he never trusted it far from his own person, but had it always conveyed with him, under a strong guard wherever he went."

"Lady Login was present, by special desire, at all sittings for the Maharaja's portrait, given by him at Buckingham Palace. At one of

these the Queen in the course of conversation asked her "If the Maharaja ever spoke of the Koh-i-Noor and if so, did he seem to regret it," observing at the same time that she had never mentioned the Jewel to him and would feel a certain delicacy about wearing it in his presence. Lady Login replied that he had never spoken of it since he came to England though he had often done so in India, and had been greatly interested in the descriptions of the operation of re-cutting it. Her Majesty then said that she hoped Lady Login would be able, before the next sitting, to ascertain what the Maharaja's feelings were on the subject and whether he would care to see it now that it was re-cut, adding, 'Remember to tell me all he says'.

"This was by no means an easy task for Lady Login for she dreaded what the Maharaja might say and did not wish to bring the matter formally into discussion. No good opportunity presented itself as days went on, until just the day before the next sitting, when as she was riding with him in Richmond Park, she managed to lead the conversation upto the subject, then trying to put the question in a casual manner, "Would you like to see the Koh-i-Noor again?" She waited in some anxiety for the reply. "Yes" was his answer, "I would give a great deal to hold it again in my own hand." "Why? For what reasons?" "I should like to take it in my power, myself to place it in her hand, now that I am a man. I was only a child then when I surrendered it to Her

Majesty by the Treaty, but now I am old enough to understand.

“The feeling of relief caused by this answer was great and it was with a light heart she repeated it to the Queen on the following day.

“Unknown to the Maharaja, who was engaged with the painter at the farther end of the room, Her Majesty at once gave orders for the Koh-i-Noor to be sent for from the Tower. After some interval there was a slight bustle near the door, the arrival of the jewel and its escort was announced and it was brought in and presented to Queen Victoria.

“Taking the diamond in her hand, Her Majesty then advanced to the dais, on which the Maharaja was posed for his portrait and before the astounded youngman realised what was passing, he found himself once more with the Koh-i-Noor on his hands while the Queen was asking him if ‘he thought it improved’, and whether he would have ‘recognised it again’. At first sight, indeed, he would hardly have done so, the cutting and European setting had so altered its character, yet inspite of these it remained still the ‘Mountain of Light’ and it was with some emotion and eagerness that he walked to the window and minutely examined it, making remarks on its diminished size and greater brilliancy, whilst the spectators could not help watching his movements with some anxiety. It was a nervous quarter of an hour for Lady Login.

“But when at length he had finished his inspection, Daleep Singh walked across the room and, with a low obeisance, presented the Koh-i-Noor to his sovereign, expressing in a few graceful words the pleasure it afforded him to have this opportunity of himself placing it in her hands. Whereupon he quietly resumed his place on the dais and the artist continued his work.”

One cannot say whether the description given above about the feelings and emotions of Daleep Singh genuinely paint them in their true colours, but if it does, then wonderful must be the self-possession and resignation of Maharaja Daleep Singh !

After the re-cutting, the Koh-i-Noor was placed in the Royal Crown worn by the Queens of England. Is it so by chance or is it so by purpose ? Having brought misfortune to so many rulers it was perhaps thought safer to fix it in the crown of the King's consort, rather than in that of the King himself. And so now this historical diamond embellishes the Royal Crown of England's Queens.¹

1. “Koh-i-Noor has been worn by all the Queens of England since Queen Victoria. It is traditionally supposed to bring good luck to a woman who wears it but ill luck to a man.” (See the booklet entitled “The Crown Jewels”, published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, on the occasion of the Coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.)



QUEEN VICTORIA IN 1840

"Ten years later the East India Company presented the Koh-i-Noor to Her Majesty, who included it in the 'Crown Jewels' as the most brilliant and the most precious diamond of the world."

CHAPTER XVIII

Demand for its return to India

It is not easy to assess the true value of the story related in the previous chapter. Neither Queen Victoria nor the Prince ever referred to it in any way. It is equally difficult to form any idea about the real feelings of Daleep Singh when he had the historical diamond on the palm of his hand and at the time when he is alleged to have made a present of it to the Queen. That he showed emotion is not denied even by Lady Login ; but what caused that emotion and what it was like, will for ever remain a mystery.

What in the beginning had been nothing but an act of grabbing on the part of the British conquerors of the Punjab, could have been shorn of, to a very great extent, of its objectionable features, had the gift from the Prince to the Queen been made in a freer atmosphere and in a more or less formal manner ; but the story, as it is available to us, leads us nowhere. Was this gift from Prince Daleep Singh an act of grace prompted by a genuine desire on the part of the Prince to honour the Queen or was it an expression of his utter helplessness ? Surely much can be said on both sides. During the long and chequered history of the Koh-i-Noor, we do not find a single instance in which it changed hands

in an atmosphere of cordiality and goodwill. A story which tells otherwise requires careful historical scrutiny.

For about a century or more, while the British ruled in this country, the transference of the Koh-i-Noor into the Queen's Crown was taken as a settled fact and no one ever cared to refer to it. It is not because India forgot all about it. How could we forget the unique diamond whose history is so inextricably interwoven with the history of our country since times immemorial? It was a sense of frustration which kept mouths sealed. There was no likelihood of anyone's paying any serious attention to a demand for its return. India was a dependency of Great Britain and the Kings and Queens of that country were the Emperors and Empresses of this land. To make a demand for its return, especially when it formed a part of the Empress's Crown, would have been taken as an act of high treason. It may have even been construed as tantamount to waging war against the King. So from the time the jewel found its place in the Imperial Crown to the date of the departure of the British from this country, Koh-i-Noor was not made the subject matter of any controversy.

As soon as India became free in 1947, the people began to think of all their treasures and rarities of which they had been deprived of. They thought of getting these things back, connected as these were, with their past glory and history. To think of India's lost possessions was

to think of the Koh-i-Noor in the first instance. People discussed the historical jewel and it formed the subject matter of discussion in a part of the Press, but it only elicited passing references, never couched in a language which could be construed as a definite demand for its return. The suggestion may have been there, but the reference was never more than a feeler. For the first time Sir C. V. Raman, the famous Indian scientist, in the course of a lecture on the structural form of diamonds referred to the Koh-i-Noor and remarked that the independence of the country could not be complete until the jewel was got back. Ever since the demand in some form or other has always been there.

On the eve of the Coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the question was freely discussed in the Indian Press. The history of the jewel was prominently displayed and comments were made on the question of its return. Though different points of view were advanced, yet more stress was laid on the delicate position existing now, when the historical diamond forms part of the Queen's Crown. The desire to have it back was there, but difficulty in the way was not overlooked. Some papers even discussed ways and means of tiding over the difficulty, but the issue did not pass beyond the stage of suggestions and counter-suggestions.

On one point, however, the opinion was unanimous; nobody liked to mar the great

occasion of the Coronation by disturbing it in any manner. All shades of opinion suggested that the question be postponed till after the Royal Coronation. People in India know the great esteem and regard which the British have for their Royalty and they did not like to do or say anything which could be construed as raising an unsavoury issue at an inopportune moment. The controversy was, therefore, stopped then ; but the idea of getting back the Koh-i-Noor has since been always present in the minds of the people who still wish that their diamond should be restored to their country immediately.

Some have even suggested purchase of the diamond but the idea has not found favour with the people. They argue that they received no price for it and they are not willing to pay any price for the same. Moreover, one cannot persuade himself to become ready to purchase a thing which he rightly believes belongs to him. Now when the Coronation is over, the question has again begun to engage the attention of the people of India.

CHAPTER XIX

Koh-i-Noor, Indian Parliament and U.N.O.

The movement for making a demand for the return of Koh-i-Noor gathered momentum in a very short time and in order to focus the attention of the Government on the public feeling on the point, Mr. Piare Lal Kureel, M.A., LL.B., a Member of the Indian Parliament, raised the question on the floor of the House of the People by asking the Government if it proposed to get back the Koh-i-Noor and other art treasures and rarities which the British had removed from India during their rule over this country.

Mr. K. D. Malaviya, Deputy Minister for Education, replying told Mr. Kureel that the Government of India were trying to get back as much as possible of the jewels, art treasures and antiques of historical importance removed from India during the British regime. Among the treasures so removed, the Deputy Minister said, was the historical jewel Koh-i-Noor.

Mr. Kureel then asked if the Government of India had arrived at some understanding with the British Government on the question of the return of these jewels, including the Koh-i-Noor. Mr. K. D. Malaviya replied that no such understanding had been arrived at and further added that the matter was under consideration.

Mr. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, the well-known poet, who is also a Member of the Parliament, at once rose to his feet and asked : "May I know whether the Government of India propose to take the question to U.N.O. if the British Government declines to return these jewels ?" Mr. Malaviya told him that "that aspect of the question had not come before the Government." This declaration of the Deputy Education Minister to the effect that the question of the demand of Koh-i-Noor was under consideration created a flutter in England and the entire British Press prominently displayed the news adding their own angry comments. The question attracted so much attention because it had a special significance at a time when England was making hectic preparations for the Coronation. Koh-i-Noor, as is well-known, is now mounted on the Queen's Crown and has thus, according to popular feeling in England, become a possession of the Royal family of that country. The people there are extremely touchy and sensitive about Royalty and demand for the return of a diamond, which is a part of the Imperial Crown, excited them. Some papers wrote even provoking editorials, challenging the right of India to talk about its restoration.

At the time when Mr. K. D. Malaviya gave the above-mentioned reply in the Parliament, the Prime Minister of India was out of the Capital. Mr. Malaviya—or the person who framed this reply—hardly realised the repercussions

which it would create in England on the eve of the Coronation of the Queen. No one seemed prepared for the excitement it would create. When people in India were rubbing their eyes with amazement at the tone of a section of the British Press in discussing the Koh-i-Noor, Mr. Nehru returned to New Delhi. He understands so well the feelings, sentiments and the mental make-up of the British for whom he entertains friendly regard and admiration. He rightly judged that it was neither desirable nor proper to raise this question at that particular moment, as it was likely to create bitterness which might lead to political complications and unpleasantness. Naturally it was his desire to shelve the ill-tuned and ill-timed controversy.

Maulana Azad, the Education Minister – obviously at Pt. Nehru's instance—promptly issued a statement repudiating the statement made in the Parliament by his Deputy and gave an assurance that India had made *no* request for the return of the Koh-i-Noor. The statement ran as follows :

“The Government of India have for some time had under consideration a proposal to make an inventory of art treasures, objects, antiques and rarities which have gone out of India, either by purchase or gift or in any other way. It is the Government's intention that when an inventory has been completed, it will consider the question of securing the return of such among the objects as may

be readily available by negotiation or purchase. It is clear to the Government that such objects cannot be brought back to India except with the willing consent of the countries where they are now deposited.

“Recently, a question in Parliament on the objects of historical importance contained a reference to the famous jewel, Koh-i-Noor. I want to make it clear that the Government of India have not at any stage contemplated asking for the return of the Koh-i-Noor, as it is not an art object and now forms a part of the British Crown jewels.”

This statement was obviously issued to set at rest the controversy about Koh-i-Noor. How far the Government's declaration reflected the will and the opinion of the people, it is difficult to measure with any amount of certainty, but this cannot be denied that millions in this country are of the opinion that since the history of this country from times immemorial is inextricably woven with the history of Koh-i-Noor, it must now, when we are free, be restored to us. People do not want that any unpleasantness should be created but they do really believe that through negotiations, there is a scope for arriving at some satisfactory arrangement with the British for the restoration of the great jewel. They argue that it is no doubt incumbent on us to respect the feelings of the nation who is in possession of it at the

present time, but does it mean that that nation should not be equally anxious to take into consideration our feelings on the subject ?

With the British people and the Royalty, Koh-i-Noor may have only some sentimental or ornamental value ; with the people of this country, it is something much more—a symbol of our continuity as a nation, an embodiment of our feelings, sentiments and aspirations, an emblem of our past glory, a tale of our past, a witness to our antiquity and a visible representation of what we were and what we are. No wonder then that the statement of Maulana Azad met a very mixed reception, with disappointment and dismay forming a major portion of the untasty mixture.

The announcement, no doubt, quietened the people for the time being, for they too wanted not to raise any controversy on the occasion of the Coronation. Respect for the feelings of other nations is a prominent trait of the Indian character and true to it they did not say a word about it till the completion of the Coronation ceremonies. But now when the Coronation is over, the question has again cropped up.

CHAPTER XX

Koh-i-Noor, the British Press and Pakistan

The storm raised in the British Press on the occasion of the reference in the Indian Parliament to Koh-i-Noor, which was included among the rarities which were to be brought back to India, reflects the sentiments and feelings of the British. Judging from the wide range of adverse comments made on this question, it is not difficult to see that they also feel strongly about Koh-i-Noor. Their angle of approach is, no doubt, different but most of them are unanimous on the question of its return to India. They do not see any reason why India should put up a demand of this sort.

As soon as Reuter flashed the news about the questions and answers in the Parliament, most of the papers in Britain displayed it prominently, adding their excited comments. *The Daily Express* argued that "India had no right to ask for the return of the famous Koh-i-Noor diamond." It added: "This magnificent jewel never belonged to Mr. Nehru's part of India. Once it belonged to the Muslim rulers of India. Later it was handed over to the British, when they conquered Lahore, in the Punjab, a century ago. But Lahore is in Pakistan. So, if there was any doubt at all about the Queen's right to retain the diamond,

it would 'certainly be to Pakistan, not to India that she should return it.'

The sting contained in the reference to 'Nehru's part of India' is worth, noting as also the amusing argument that the diamond having been taken at Lahore and Lahore being in Pakistan, the jewel would, if at all, be returned to the latter. The paper is conveniently silent as to who gave it to the British when they conquered Lahore? One could have easily understood if the line of argument had been that since it was taken from the Sikhs, it would be returned to them, but Sikhs are in India and that was the difficulty of *The Daily Express*.

The Daily Mirror, however, saw another difficulty. It questioned the power of the British nation to return the Koh-i-Noor because it belonged to the Queen. "It does not belong to the nation," it said, "it is the Royal family's personal property, since it was presented to Queen Victoria by the East India Company." How did the East India Company come into its possession? But this is not a comfortable question.

The Times, however, differs from *The Daily Mirror* in respect of the ownership of the diamond. It is of the opinion that the British people are its owners. After tracing the history of its possession by the British, the paper asks in a dignified manner if it could be regarded as a 'lawful prize'.

Then it adds, "nobody can regret the decision, which transferred such a prize to the English Crown and rendered it, what it virtually is at present, the property of the British people "

Victor Thompson looked at the issue from yet another point of view in *The Daily Herald*. "So, who owns what?" he asks. "If India wants back Koh-i-Noor, why shouldn't Greece demand the Elgin Marble, the priceless statuary which is the finest exhibit in the British Musuem. Continuing he says: "These sculptures were taken from the Parthenon in Athens by Lord Elgin, Ambassador to Constantinople at the beginning of the last century. At the time they were neglected and some of the marble was being stolen to make door-step.

"Lord Elgin, furthermore, had official permission to remove them but it was Turkish permission, not Greek. Greece was under Turkish domination at the time.

"So, who owns what again ?

"And who is the legal owner of the British Museum's Persian carpets and its Chinese paintings and Hebrew manuscripts and Japanese carvings and Polonesian idols ?

"Most of them were bought by travellers and presented to the authorities-but they were usually bought from people who did not know their worth. The ethical situation, there, you will agree, is somewhat clouded

“There’s also Cleopatra’s needle on the embankment. We ‘persuaded’ subject Egypt to make a present of that to us ; and to give us hundreds of mummies and other relics. Our chaps just went and dug them up”. After tracing history of the marble and other antiques, he adds, “surely it all boils down to this, Mr. Malaviya, there can be no ownership of priceless relics and objects of great art. They are international. They are world property. They should not be claimed by this nation or that and they should not be hoarded in any one place. They should be sent permanently on tour from museum to museum all over the world.” Describing the Koh-i-Noor as a geological freak, he says, “there are, I learn, at least ten better stones locked away in safes in Johannesburg.”

Mr. Thompson has, no doubt, tackled the subject in an impressive manner and has raised the controversy to a higher level, but he let the cat out of the bag by remarking in an unguarded manner that “the problem is somewhat complicated to-day because some of the Punjab is not in India at all, but in the equally independent dominion of Pakistan.”

Was Pakistan created to become a solution for such difficult international problems ?

The Daily Worker, however, discussed the subject in quite a different strain. “Indians”, it said, “being nothing if not polite, are not insisting that the jewel be returned before the Coronation. From the point of view of a really free India, it is much more important

that the tribute still being paid by India to British capitalist interest be stopped." Continuing, it says: "It is more important to stop India being robbed now than it is for Britain to restore some of the fruits of past robberies, though both are essential."

Thus the British Press spoke out its mind on the subject when the question about the return of Koh-i-noor was discussed on the floor of the Indian Parliament. Immediately on receipt of the news in England all leading papers like The Times, Daily Express, Daily Telegraph, Manchester Guardian, Scotsman, Daily Mirror, News Chronicle, Yorkshire Post, Daily Herald, Daily Worker and others prominently displayed it in a somewhat excited manner. The right of India to make the demand was seriously challenged. The controversy would have developed along unpleasant lines and would have even created bitterness had not New Delhi discreetly stepped in to put a stop to it, through the statement of Maulana Azad, assuring the British that the Government of India did not contemplate making any request for the return of the jewel which was now a part of the British Crown.

The statement was flashed to Britain immediately after it was made and it was promptly and prominently displayed in the entire British Press with a feeling of great relief.

"Last Monday, Mr. Malaviya, the Deputy Minister for Education," remarked *The Morning Post*, "indicated that the Indian Govern-

ment were trying to get back various objects of art and jewels, which had been taken out of the country during the British rule. But Maulana Azad said today that these treasures could only be returned with the willing consent of the countries which possess it."

"India will not ask Britain", wrote *The Scotsman*, "to return the Koh-i-Noor diamond—the fabulous jewel which now forms part of the Crown.....thus allaying any fears of a Coronation year squabble over the famous gem." "India will not ask Britain to return the Koh-i-Noor diamond which now forms part of the Crown of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother." said *The Manchester Guardian* with evident relief.

The Times while giving the news says that the Government of India has denied that it is seeking return of the Koh-i-Noor diamond. The impression that it was, arose from the comprehension of Parliamentary answers on the subject of Indian art treasures, jewellery and antiques now in Britain.

India showed tremendous good taste in stopping all reference to the subject after Maulana Azad's statement and waited for the completion of the Coronation ceremonies ; but the controversy left an unsavoury taste, because a section of the British Press dragged in Pakistan unnecessarily, knowing full well that she had nothing to do with Koh-i-Noor, and could not come into the picture at all. Pakistan was not in existence when Koh-i-

Noor was taken by the British from Lahore. Obviously, it was done to thwart India's demand by playing Pakistan against this country. Incidentally it threw a flood of light on the subject as to why the British were so anxious to divide this country before leaving it.



HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

“Will the people and the Parliament of India invite the Queen to the Capital and at a grand ceremonial *Durbar* present to Her Majesty an Address of Welcome and along with it offer her the Koh-i-Noor to wear it as a symbol of India’s friendship, goodwill and hospitality ?”

CHAPTER XXI

The Solution

Now, what can be the solution of this knotty problem ?

The difficulty arises because this famous diamond has now become a part of the Royal Crown, worn by the Queens of England. This has added considerably to the delicacy of the question. Had it been lodged in the Tower of London or some other treasury, negotiations for its return would not have been difficult or improper ; but now, when it is mounted on a Crown, would it be proper or even decent on our part to make a demand for its return ?

There are no two opinions about the fact that the manner in which the jewel was taken away by force from Lahore was a high-handed one and it could not, therefore, be regarded as a 'lawful prize'. Its despatch to England and presentation to Queen Victoria by the East India Company was even less justified. Some prominent British historians have themselves questioned the propriety of the proceedings which ended in its becoming a royal possession and recently when reference to it was made in the British Press, there were at least some papers who referred to the improper way in which Koh-i-Noor was grabbed by the British.

The incident related in Chapter XVII, however, to some extent changes the colour of this much discussed episode in the chequered history of this historical diamond ; but it is very difficult to say anything definitely about it, as both Queen Victoria and Prince Daleep Singh kept a discreet silence as to what happened in this connection. The only available version is that of Lady Login and in spite of the great authenticity which is attached to her account of the period during which she remained associated with Prince Daleep Singh, her memoirs cannot be regarded as possessing historical veracity.

Was Prince Daleep Singh a free agent when he presented the diamond to the Queen ? Was there any other alternative before him ? If he, being the rightful owner, made a present of it willingly and voluntarily to the Queen, both legally and morally the British Royalty became its owners and the question of its restoration does not arise. But can a private gift given in the manner described by Lady Login be taken as a valid substitute for the formalities and legalities without which such transfers cannot be recognised, especially when they concern two nations ? In that light the so-called gift by Prince Daleep Singh cannot be regarded as possessing any special significance, making in any way any difference in the moral and legal side of the diamond's possession. It is thus very difficult to say anything precise in this matter.

The other point for consideration is that India, inspite of being a Republic, is a member of the Commonwealth. The Crown is the symbolic head of the Commonwealth. As such, India should have, as long as she is in the Commonwealth, respect for the Crown and regard for those who wear it. Would it not be inconsistent with India's present position to ask for a diamond which has become a part of the Crown? It is for the people of England to decide whether the diamond belongs to the Royalty or to the people. In that great country both belong to each other and no line of demarcation can be drawn between the two. But there is no doubt about the fact that it is at the present time in the possession of the Royalty. Would it not appear discourteous to ask the Royalty to give back a jewel bedecked in a crown ?

Now let us study another aspect of the question. If it is decided to return the diamond, who would be entitled to receive it ? The Sikhs can legitimately claim back Koh-i-Noor as theirs, because the British took it from them. Prince Daleep Singh was a Christian when he presented it to the Queen, so the Christians can also advance a claim. Hindus can legitimately claim to have it because they were the original owners and held it for the longest period. Muslims have obviously no claim to it, but, instigated by the British Press, they might, through Pakistan, demand its restoration on the plea that the last owner being Shah Shuja, who though an Afghan,

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was a Muslim and he having given it to Ranjit Singh at Lahore and Lahore being in Pakistan, it should be restored to that country. Some British papers have already hinted at Pakistan's claim to the Koh-i-Noor.

And who can stop Persia and Afghanistan from advancing similar claims ? Their Rulers obtained it by force and retained it for a considerable time.

If Pakistan were to lay a claim, she would be readily made a party to the suit. Even if there are no grounds for her being a party, some grounds would be readily created and Koh-i-Noor might thus become the subject matter of another dispute before the U. N. O. The controversy might drag on for years, commissions may be appointed to go into its past history, observers might be posted to gauge the feelings of the people in Pakistan and India and ultimately a solution may be found in the partition of the great Koh-i-Noor. But that would be an end of the historical jewel.

Would India, therefore, gain anything by running all these risks and in the end getting only a portion of it ? She would lose grace, her goodwill with Britain would be impaired, and the dispute would involve waste of time, energy and money. But with all that, whatever be the merits of her case and however strong be the arguments in her favour, the risk of a division would remain. So why not keep mum and have the British people's thanks ?

The ultra-nationalists and enthusiastic patriots can turn round and say: No, Koh-i-Noor is not simply a priceless jewel for this country. With it is woven the history of India. Its romance is the story of the rise and fall of empires. Potentates staked their all to possess it. Its owners became kings, though to some it brought death and destruction. It melted crowns, it shattered kingdoms, it brought spell and ruin, and blood and fire followed in its wake. But still there were endless struggles and wars to possess it. The tragic end of some of its holders did not discourage other aspirants to toil for its possession. Many paid its price in terms of dismembered empires, painful deaths, broken limbs and scorched eyes ; but still the desire to possess it knew no decline. It travelled from India to Persia, came back, again went to Afghanistan, and again returned to the country of its origin. Once more it left its shores and crossed the seven seas for the first time. Will it return to India once again ? Now when we are free, why should it not ?

This is how they argue ; and, no doubt, there is much force in the arguments they advance. It may be a mere sentiment to demand it back, but a people bereft of national sentiment soon wither away. If Koh-i-Noor were to return to India, what a mighty wave of national enthusiasm would sweep over the country ! It would take the people off their feet and carry them up to heights from where they would be in a position to measure their past greatness. The idea is, therefore, interesting and exciting.

But what has a Republic to do with jewels ? Jewels are related to Royalty. If India gets back the Koh-i-Noor, it would be placed in some museum as an historical piece of rare value. Would it make much difference if it remains where it is, mounted on the Queen's Crown ? The solution of these questions is baffling. The niceties and delicacies of the problem are intriguing. The more we think of the problem the more confused we feel. Sentiments of two great nations are in conflict. How to solve the dilemma ?

In this state of confusion one is inclined to give thought to a sensible suggestion made by *The Daily Mirror*, which is the only sane and sober solution put forward by any one, either in England or India, so far. It said, "We cannot say what the Queen would decide. But were she to offer the diamond to India and were the Indian Government to invite her to wear it as a symbol of India's friendship, the problem would be resolved gracefully on both sides." That the suggestion is thought-provoking in many respects goes without saying, taking into consideration, as it does, the sentiments on both sides.

Will England make this gesture of goodwill to enable the people of India to reciprocate it ? In a free India it is the people who are the real masters.

It is expected that the British Royalty, backed by the British people and the British Parliament would act promptly in the matter

and return the Koh-i-Noor to India forthwith ; cheerfully and gracefully. It is also hoped that the people and the Parliament of India would later on invite the Queen to the Capital and at a grand ceremonial *Durbar* present to Her Majesty an Address of Welcome and along with it offer her the Koh-i-Noor to wear it as a symbol of India's friendship, goodwill and hospitability.

*Win her with gifts, if she respect not words,
Dumb jewels often in their silent kind
More than quick words do move a woman's mind.*

—Shakespeare : Two Gentlemen of Verona, Act 3, Sc.I.

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